

MILLER, MARVA SATTERFIELD, Ph.D. Beginning Elementary Education Teachers' Perceptions Concerning Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms: Beliefs and Attitudes toward Preparation. (2015)

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Schools and teachers are increasingly faced with meeting the needs of a diverse student population that can be successful with the general curriculum and prepared for the 21st century. As such, teacher educators assist in meeting this challenge by continuous improvement to teacher education programs preparing teachers to meet the educational needs of all students. The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of beginning elementary education teachers concerning teaching students with disabilities in general education classrooms. A mixed method study was conducted using a three part survey that solicited participant information related to personal demographics, 32 Likert-type scale questions with a certain level of agreement to attitudes, beliefs, preparation, and knowledge of inclusion. In addition, open-ended questions allowed participants to include more in-depth responses to thoughts about their overall experiences, beliefs, and support.

The participants were graduates of a southeastern regional university teacher preparation program in elementary education. Demographics of participants indicated that the majority were Caucasian females, worked in general education classes, and were not required to take any special education coursework in their teacher education program. The findings suggested that although a high percentage of beginning elementary education teachers' believe in teaching and including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, many lack the necessary knowledge and skills needed to

successfully engage students with disabilities in their classrooms. Findings of this study continue to emphasize the need for beginning general education teachers to receive not only more in-depth preparation at the preservice level, which supports successful transition from preparation to practice, but also increased opportunities for professional development and in-service training on meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

This study may provide a platform supporting positive attitudes towards professional teacher preparation and experiences in teaching students with disabilities in general education classrooms. By helping bridge the gap between preparation and the implementation of effective instructional practices to meet the needs of diverse learners, beginning teachers can be supported by pedagogy and evidence based educational practices learned through teacher education programs.

BEGINNING ELEMENTARY EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS  
CONCERNING TEACHING IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS:  
BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD PREPARATION

by

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Dedicated to

My son, Jalen, for his patience, love, prayers, and encouragement throughout this process

My parents, Roxie and Richard L. Satterfield, for their love, prayers, and continued support, as well as their examples of being great educators throughout the years

To God be the glory for the things he has done

## APPROVAL PAGE

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

With a heightened awareness and increased need for students with disabilities to be educated alongside their nondisabled peers, there has been a progressive movement towards inclusive education. Inclusive education suggests that all students in a school, regardless of their ability or disability, become a part of the school community (Burke & Sutherland, 2004). As a result of the passing of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) 1975, otherwise known as PL 94-142, EAHCA mandated that all children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Least restrictive environment (LRE) in this context means “students with disabilities who would be educated in integrated settings alongside students with and without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate” (Yell, 2012, p. 270). Although students with disabilities are being integrated into general education classrooms, the true connotation of inclusion has yet to be known or implemented (Swain, Nordness, & Janssen, 2012). As a result, several court cases transpired which encouraged the passing of federal mandates that would further ensure more educational rights for students with disabilities. Eventually, the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 passed and emphasized the involvement of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum (Yell, 2012).

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that of the 53.9 million school age children ages 5–17 in the United States, about 2.8 million (5.2%) were reported to have a disability. Of those, 171,433 were students with disabilities in North Carolina (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). As student populations continue to become more diverse, so do the needs and abilities of the learners. Therefore, with inclusion changing not only what teachers teach but also how they teach (Heron & Jorgensen, 1995), there has become a need for teachers to have the knowledge and experience to be able to effectively teach diverse learners using inclusive practices (Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). It is important to mention that with the increased demand for inclusive instructional practices to be implemented in general education school settings also comes the necessity for teacher preparation programs that essentially prepare teachers to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. Just as important, with all students now being held to higher academic standards, teacher preparation programs must ensure that general and special education teachers are adequately prepared in both course and field work to readily meet such diverse needs (Cooper, Kurtts, Baber, & Vallecorsa, 2008). Therefore, it is essential that teachers be provided with relevant content and practice from which applicable experiences can develop during teacher preparation that can be transferred into classroom application.

One of the most perplexing predicaments of teacher education is the lack of preparation to work with students with disabilities that most teachers, have upon entering the classroom (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Hunter-Johnson, Newton, & Cambridge-Johnson, 2014; Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010). In fact, Beacham and Rouse

(2012) and Melnick and Meister (2008) state that many teachers feel unprepared to deal with diverse learners their first years in the classroom and indicate that they have little or no experience working with students with disabilities (Cameron & Cook, 2007; Cook, 2002; Harvey, Yssel, Bauserman, & Merbler, 2010).

It is also noted that beginning teachers bring with them a history of preconceived ideas or beliefs and practices from their personal lives and experiences, as well as attitudes and problems related to teaching all students (Melnick & Meister, 2008). In order to redirect these preconceptions, teachers must be afforded the opportunity to acquire the skills and wisdom to develop more inclusive pedagogy knowledge at the preservice and inservice level (Garriott, Miller, & Synder, 2003; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Romi & Leyser, 2006). Unfortunately, the implementation of some inclusive policies, practices and procedures have yielded barriers to educate all students equally, which affects the desired end result of positive attitudes and behavior towards inclusive practices (Kluth, Straut, & Biklin, 2003). In connection with these areas, lack of confidence and knowledge of disabilities influences the attitudes with which teachers initially enter institutions of higher education (IHE) (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006; Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005). In fact, it is important to note that Kim (2012) states in teaching students with disabilities, teachers' sense of self-efficacy (e.g., ability) is an essential component of teacher preparedness that influences their attitude toward inclusion. Just as important, teachers' beliefs and practices are influenced by: (a) coursework (Kim, 2011), (b) field experience, (c) support, (d) collaboration (Brantlinger, 1996; Buford & Casey, 2012; Lastrapes, Neigishi, & Winter,



2011; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006), (e) personal experiences, and (g) policies and procedures, all of which may have an impact on how inclusion is viewed by teachers during teacher preparation (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003). Because so many barriers hinder the successful implementation of inclusion, it is important to discuss what is both needed and expected of teachers during their preparation programs to better assist teachers as they transition from theory (i.e., preparation) to practice (i.e., classroom).

Therefore, with regards to policy, legislative mandates under No Child Left Behind expect teachers to be knowledgeable about collaboration, as well as capable of demonstrating it when entering the teaching profession (Brownwell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005). In order to meet the demands of the 21st century, teacher preparation programs need to orchestrate extensive in-depth training and opportunities for field-experiences in order for teacher candidates to acquire the confidence, knowledge, and skill base needed to effectively work with parents and other professionals as they prepare for the future (Cameron & Cook, 2007). However, it has been reported that skills and techniques teachers learn and practice in college classrooms, are neither always maintained over time, nor do these skills transfer to actual classrooms and students (Scheeler, 2008).

For example, during Scheeler's (2008) review of the research, several generalization and maintenance factors emerged that were recognized as promoting generalization of teaching techniques. Those factors were (a) immediate feedback, (b) training to mastery on specific skills, (c) programming for generalization, and (d) providing performance feedback in classroom settings. As a result, these four

components for a sequential heuristic guide were stated as being highly likely to promote generalization of newly acquired teaching skills by preservice teachers as they transition from IHE to the classroom setting (Scheeler, 2008). Scheeler, Bruno, Grubb, and Seavey (2009) continued this research by conducting two experiments using preservice teachers to collect baseline and intervention data. In both instances, participants successfully completed an instructional methods course in direct instruction, as well as responded to a questionnaire. Overall results demonstrated that immediate feedback (i.e., bug in ear technology) was effective in promoting acquisition of evidence-based teaching skills. However, without continued support, participants' teaching techniques decreased, thus indicating that in preparing teachers evidence-based practices must be sustained.

Likewise, Berry (2008) states that because of the increased involvement of general education teachers in the planning and delivery of instruction for students with disabilities (p. 1151), through university coursework and field experiences teachers should have the opportunity during teacher preparation programs to learn about not only the type of students they will encounter, but also the instructional strategies to use with students with diverse needs. This in turn will lead to opportunities of demonstration of theory to practice, which provides an avenue for teachers to be assessed and then given immediate feedback on performance from their instructors (Scheeler et al., 2009). Such opportunities will allow time to reflect and make adjustments for future instructional practices. Although studies have been conducted on the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of beginning teachers and inclusion (Boe, Shin, & Cook, 2007; Melnick & Meister, 2008) there has been limited research on teachers' overall perception of

preparedness to implement inclusive practices as they transition from preparation to practice (Aypay, 2009; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003).

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is important to note that as a result of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandating that to the maximum extent possible students with disabilities have access to and be educated in the general education setting (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011; Turnbull, Huerta, & Stowe, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Yell, 2012), IDEA requires that the first educational placement considered for students with disabilities be the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). This mandate has proven effective, as the percentage of students with disabilities ages 6-17 years included in general education classrooms, defined as spending greater than 79% of their time in general education classrooms, increased by 28% from 1995 to 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Eventually, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), incorporated provisions that related to the academic performance of these students (Yell, 2012).

Even more important, as the concept of inclusion continues to be embraced in general education school settings the need for more efficient and effective teachers becomes essential to the implementation of inclusive practices. However, with teachers feeling ill-prepared to work with students with disabilities (Buford & Casey, 2012; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012) and lack of experience thereof during the first years of teaching (McCray & McHatton, 2011), adjustments must be made to ensure teachers

have the knowledge and skill base to successfully implement inclusive practices. Notably, teacher preparation programs have put performance-based evaluations in place (Shippen et al., 2005); however, many beginning teachers continue to not only lack preparation but also not transfer acquired knowledge to practice (Buford & Casey, 2012). Furthermore, many early career teachers perceive that they are adequately prepared to work with students with disabilities after completion of their teacher preparation. However, upon entering the classroom they voice a lack of confidence and proper training (Aypay, 2009; Buford & Casey, 2012; Cook, 2001). The literature provides little insight to beginning elementary education teachers' preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms and how their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions affect preparedness to implement inclusive practices. For this reason, it is important to explore the development and implementation of inclusive practices with beginning elementary education teachers as they transition from preparation to their first years of practice.

### **Purpose of the Study**

With the ultimate goal of inclusion being to create schools with prepared teachers who recognize all students have the right to participate in all aspects of the school community, teacher training institutions must provide the education necessary for effective implementation of inclusionary practices (Hwang & Evans, 2011; Swain et al., 2012). Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions of preparedness for inclusion and how their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions may affect or create obstacles (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014) that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive practices during their first years in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

A survey using a Likert scale rating and open-ended responses will be used to answer the following research questions.

1. What attitudes do beginning elementary education teachers have toward inclusion?
2. How do beginning elementary education teachers believe their teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them for inclusion?
3. What supports do beginning elementary education teachers believe are needed to effectively assist them as they transition from teacher preparation programs to classroom practice?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study has the potential to be influential for educational requirements relative to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and the continued development of teacher preparation programs that present instruction and strategies for the inclusive environment. Furthermore, the data obtained from this study could influence the implementation of preservice coursework and field experiences to be fulfilled in general teacher education preparation, as well as the future application of knowledge offered through professional development, in-service training, and sustained support that beginning teachers' experience.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework for examining beginning elementary education teachers' attitudes and perceptions of preparedness for inclusive practices may be established by

utilizing Vygotsky's Theory of Social-constructivism and Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (PBT) (Ajzen, 1991, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior is used to determine behavior arising from attitudes, especially towards individuals with disabilities (Ajzen, 1991). In the same way, Vygotsky's theory of social-constructivism supports teachers both in preparation and practice for inclusion with regards to collaboration, coursework and field experiences (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Vygotsky's Social-constructivist Theory**

Vygotsky's social-constructivist approach allows prospective teachers to not only reflect on personal thinking (Adams, Bondy, & Kuhel, 2005), but also deconstruct prior knowledge and attitude to comprehend how they evolve to present understanding (Kroll & LaBoskey, 1996). As a result, the concept of acquiring knowledge by constructing bridges from former knowledge to new ways of knowing is demonstrated (Lynch, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers engage in scaffolding and apprenticeship in which the teacher or someone with a higher ability or understanding than the learner helps to structure or arrange a task so that a novice can work on it successfully. Furthermore, this theory builds on the role of the teacher in collaboration. Once again the teacher's role is to scaffold the collaborative process while asking reflective questions that will challenge the learners' explanation, which in turn will support their own reflection and review. Hence, in a social constructivist learning environment, not only does effective learning happen, but individuals develop through the interactive process of discussing, negotiating, and sharing (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, the constructivist philosophy

does not dictate how an individual should teach, but recognizes the learners' behavior as a direct reflection of the individual's life experiences.

Therefore, Vygotsky's theory provides underpinnings for inclusion by merging the cultural, social, and problem solving components that are needed in inclusion, as well as collaborative learning experiences. Vygotsky's theory focuses on the connection between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences, thus promoting learning context in which teachers play an active role in learning, both socially and cognitively (Vygotsky, 1978). As a result, learning becomes a reciprocal experience in which student and teacher roles are shifted.

### **Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior**

Ajzen's theory of planned behavior suggests that attitudes toward behavior may be influenced by past experiences, previous knowledge, and newly acquired knowledge. Consequently, attitudes have been found to play a significant role in determining behavior (Ajzen, 1991); therefore it is imperative to establish the factors that shape teachers' attitudes as they prepared and begin working in inclusive settings. According to Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991, 2005), an individual's actions are guided by three kinds of beliefs, (a) behavioral (attitude), (b) normative (subjective norms), and (c) controlled (perceived behavioral control). In turn, the aforementioned beliefs predict or are said to determine an individuals' intentions and or behavior.

Ajzen's theory provides support for understanding the attitudes of beginning teachers towards inclusive practices, which in turn influences the teachers' behavior towards students with disabilities. These attitudes may possibly stem from lack of

knowledge, experience, or preparation in working with students with disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000a; Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Landrum, 2000). Hence, it is important to realize how beginning teachers' attitudes may become an obstacle that may have an effect on students accessing an equitable education.

For this reason, in order to best prepare teachers for inclusion, it is important to provide foundational knowledge and learning experiences that encourage Vygotsky's concepts of scaffolding and apprenticeship, while also examining Ajzen's theory of planned behavior as seen in Figure 1.

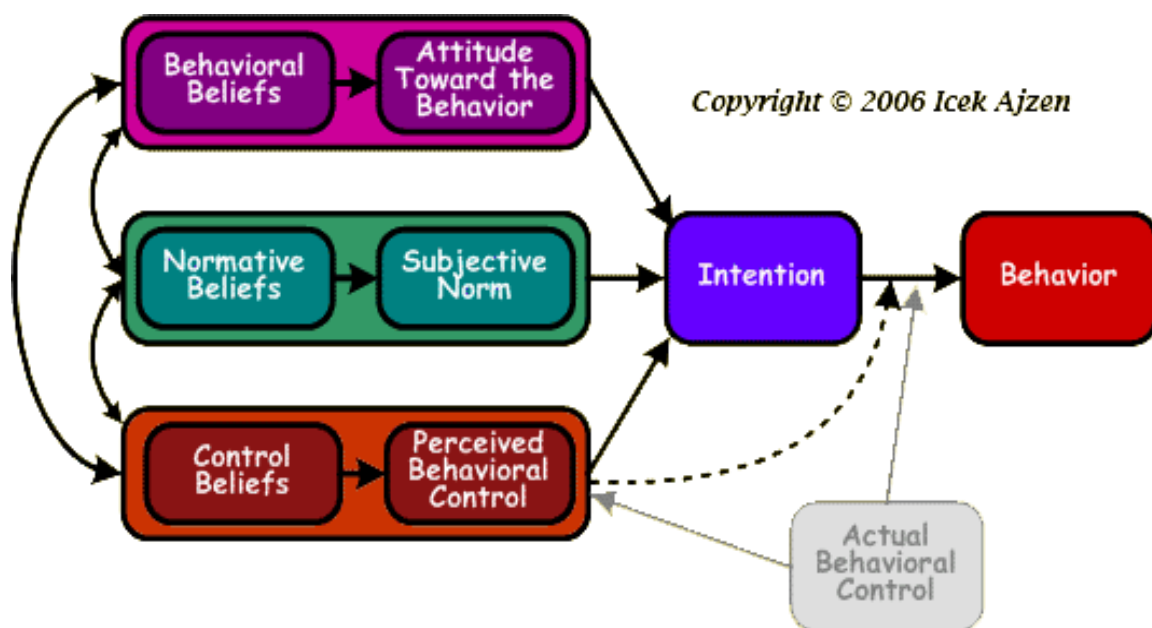


Figure 1. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior.

In doing so, teachers will be able to partake in inclusive learning experiences during preparation and practice (Adams et al., 2005; Boyer & Bandy, 1997; Buford & Casey, 2012; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Hwang & Evans, 2011) at individual comfort



levels while progressively building knowledge, and increasing their confidence and simultaneously developing an awareness of attitudes towards students with disabilities. Equally important, social constructivism includes the reflective process and encourages all members of a learning community to present their ideas strongly, while remaining open to the ideas of others (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Summary of Methodology**

A three part survey instrument was used to conduct a mixed research method to examine beginning elementary education teachers' preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms, thus looking at their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. The survey included three sections: (a) demographics, (b) Likert-type scale questions, and (c) open-ended questions. The survey was disseminated, as an on-line survey, to beginning teachers who have acquired and completed their teacher preparation at a teacher education program at a southeastern university in the United States. Prior to conducting the study limitations, assumptions, and delimitations were discussed.

### **Limitations, Assumptions, and Delimitations**

The limitations and assumptions of this study include (a) a limited number of participants, (b) assumption that participants understand inclusion, and (c) lack of diversity of participants. This study was limited by the selection of participants because all were selected from one university in the southeastern region. Thus, making the sample size small, and the ability to discern broad themes more difficult, as well as effecting external validity.

The assumption taken with this study was that beginning elementary education teachers understood the term inclusion and provided honest answers to the all posed survey questions by openly voicing their beliefs and perceptions as novice teachers working in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, several terms used within the context of an inclusive classroom were defined. Furthermore, the lack of diversity of participants, limited the generalizability of findings to larger populations. In addition, obtaining only the perspectives of beginning elementary education teachers limited the generalizability. Delimitations of the study focused only on beginning teachers who participated in the study.

The specific goal of this study was to examine beginning elementary education teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions in the context of preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms. The study represented the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of beginning elementary education teachers at the time of the research study. These beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions could have expanded across a broader range if participant sampling was taken across a larger geographical area in the United States.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Attitudes*—Attitude is viewed as the way you feel or think about someone or something. It is a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, events, or activities based on past or present experience. Attitude is measurable and changeable and can influence emotion or behavior (“Attitudes,” 2013).

*Beginning teacher*—“Teachers who have not yet completed three years of teaching after receiving initial teacher certification” (Melnick & Meister, 2008, p. 40).

*Beliefs*—Beliefs are defined as a proposition that is accepted as true by the individual that holds that idea (Richardson, 1996). In addition, Richardson (1996) states that experience and reflection on action may lead to change in beliefs.

*Co-teaching*—“The partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs” (Friend, 2008).

*Field experience*—A variety of early and ongoing field-based opportunities in which candidates may observe, assist, tutor, and or conduct research. Field experiences may occur in off-campus settings such as schools, community centers, or homeless shelters (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2014).

*General/regular education teacher*—An individual that has completed a state approved education program based on professional teaching standards and competencies and is licensed and or certified to teach a specific curricular area within a specific grade level (i.e., elementary, middle, high school).

*Inclusion*—Inclusion, has taken on a variety of meanings in the educational community. According to Hodkinson (2005), some view inclusion as a whole-school rather than an individual teaching issue with the provision of additional support for pupils being high on the newly qualified teacher’s agenda. In fact, teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) view inclusion as the total immersion of ELL students into the regular education setting with additional support of ESL (U.S.

Department of Education, n.d.). Others view inclusion as part of a continuum of services designed for individual students (Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009). However, for the purpose of this literature review, inclusion will be defined as “a professional belief that students with disabilities should be integrated into general education classrooms whether or not they can meet traditional curricular standards and should be full members of those classrooms” (Friend & Bursuck, 2002, p. 505).

*Inclusive practices*—Inclusive practices are attitudes, approaches, and strategies taken to ensure that students are not excluded or isolated from the learning environment and can actively participate in all activities (“Inclusive practice,” 2014).

*Perception*—What one believes to be true about a concept or idea (Deemer, 2004).

*Preparation program*—A combination of courses and experiences that lead to a state professional credential or professional certificate (Council for Exceptional Children, 2012).

*Preparedness*—The extent to which an individual can carry out a job, which includes teacher training programs, additional courses in special education, and prior experience working with special education students. For purposes of this review, preparedness is the readiness to implement skills and knowledge obtained through training, experiences, and coursework.

*Preservice teacher*—A preservice teacher is a student presently enrolled in a teacher education program at the undergraduate level that has never taught in a public or private school as a certified teacher.

*Self-efficacy*—Self-efficacy, as stated by Bandura (1997) is one's perceived level of ability, capability, or behaviors one possesses. Likewise, Schunk and Pajares (2005) define self-efficacy as an individual's confidence and ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task. Furthermore, self-efficacy can affect an individual's choice of activities, motivation, and achievement outcomes (Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Therefore, the examination of preservice teachers' perceptions of preparedness to implement inclusive practices will look at how attitudes towards inclusion affect this perceived ability. For the purpose of this literature review, self-efficacy will be viewed in terms of perception about performance in a given area.

*Teacher preparation program*—A state-approved course of study, the completion of which signifies that a student has met all of the state's educational and /or training requirements for initial certification or licensure to teach in the state's elementary or secondary schools (Young, Grant, Montbriand, & Therriault, 2001).

### **Summary**

As the needs of education continue to shift (Darling-Hammond, 2010), so must teachers as they prepare to work in inclusive classrooms. As novice teachers enter the classroom they must acknowledge the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that have developed towards inclusion as a result of personal and educational experiences while continuously building upon newly acquired knowledge and skills to effectively perform inclusive practices. While inclusion is quite often perceived from a positive viewpoint by novice teachers, research has shown that acknowledgement and acceptance of inclusion does not always mean the implementation thereof (Cameron & Cook, 2007). Hence,

these perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs must be further examined as more elementary education teachers enter their first year in the classroom. Therefore, this study serves to document beginning elementary education teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of preparedness to implement inclusive practices in the general education setting. Chapter two presents a review of relevant literature followed by chapter three which describes the methodology. Chapter IV will present a detailed data analysis and Chapter V will discuss the results of the study, limitations, recommendations, and the need for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Despite federal mandates to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, teachers continue to have mixed feelings about their preparedness to work in inclusive settings (Melnick & Meister, 2008; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). McLaughlin (2010) acknowledges the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) have triggered uncertainty in provisions surrounding policy and practice of equitable education. However, the intent of IDEA is to provide equity in education for students with disabilities. Despite the progressive stance that inclusion has made on the educational front, there continues to be numerous factors that affect its implementation (e.g., preparation, attitudes, skills, belief, resources, and support).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 2004, does not require inclusion nor is the term included in the IDEA statute or regulations. Instead, the law requires that children with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment appropriate" (LRE) that is appropriate for their needs. Furthermore, least restrictive environment does not mandate inclusion (Yell, 2012). In addition, IDEA envisions that the "least restrictive environment" begin with placement in the regular education classroom. IDEA recognizes that it is not appropriate to place all children in the regular education classroom. The law intends that the degree of "inclusion" be driven

by the student's needs as determined by the IEP team. The intent of IDEA is to educate as many students with disabilities as possible in the regular education classroom, while still meeting their unique, individual needs.

Several studies indicate that teachers often are not prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Allday, Neilson-Gatti, & Hudson, 2013; Buford & Casey, 2012; Burke & Sutherland 2004; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014; Melnick & Meister, 2008; Shippen et al., 2005). This, in turn, affects their attitudes when working in the general education classroom with students with disabilities (McHatton & Parker, 2013). Busch, Pederson, Espin, and Weissenburger (2001) report that when first year teachers were asked about their attitudes toward working with students with disabilities, those with prior experience in and knowledge of disabilities responded with more confidence and positive attitudes than those with less experience and knowledge. Although participating in higher education programs, many voice concerns about their unpreparedness for teaching in the inclusive classroom (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Buford & Casey, 2012). While Mock and Kauffman (2002) argue that there is no way to adequately prepare teachers for the reality of inclusion, other researchers suggest that the appropriate coursework and field experiences provide sufficient training for inclusive practices (Shade & Stewart, 2001; Shippen et al., 2005). As a result, many preservice teachers fulfill the requirements of their preparation programs believing that they are well prepared to implement inclusive practices (Romi & Leyser, 2006; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). Yet, Gravett, Henning, and Eiselen (2011) state that many teacher educators know that where preservice teachers are concerned, perception does not always



match the reality of classroom practice. Therefore, the question remains as to why teachers are completing their teacher education programs having demonstrated preparedness, as measured by state competency standards, but when faced with the reality of inclusion they express unpreparedness. Therefore, indicating that additional training (e.g., classroom management, differentiating instruction) and experience (e.g., roles and responsibilities) to implement successful inclusive practices (Allday et al., 2013; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Subban & Sharma, 2005) are needed.

Because both training and education foster the success of inclusion (Winter, 2006), many educator preparation programs have remodeled their programs to align standards and competencies that reflect preparedness for inclusive practices. Examining the literature on beginning elementary education teachers' attitudes towards inclusion to determine if teachers' perceptions of preparedness accurately reflect their ability to implement inclusive practices once in the classroom will help provide answers to such questions as (a) what attitudes do beginning elementary education teachers have toward inclusion, (b) how do beginning elementary education teachers believe their teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them for inclusion, and (c) what supports do beginning elementary education teachers believe are needed to effectively assist as they transition from teacher preparation programs to classroom practice?

### **History of Inclusion**

Historically, people with disabilities in the U.S. were excluded from educational activities, especially in general education (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011; Winzer, 2009; Yell, 2012). Nevertheless, students with disabilities were not included in the Civil Rights

Act and continued to remain separate, but not equal (McLaughlin, 2010). For this reason, parents of students with disabilities continued to advocate for their children's educational rights and began their own civil rights movement (Yell, 2012). As a result, students with disabilities evolved from a separate educational environment to one of inclusion. Thus, prompting a need to improve teacher preparation programming in order to better prepare preservice teachers with the knowledge and skill set needed to meet the diverse needs of students (Cooper et al., 2008) as they transition from preparation to practice. A timeline of the inclusion movement provides a glimpse of this transition, beginning with the 1950s.

### **1950s**

By the 1950s it was apparent that segregated special education classes were not the appropriate educational setting for meeting the needs of students with disabilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). Subsequently, the ruling of *Brown v Board of Education* (Yell, 2012) 1954 mandated that public schools would no longer be segregated thus allowing students to have equal access to education. Granted the Brown decision referred to racial segregation, it would influence the way people thought of those with disabilities (Yell, 2012). Also in 1954, as students with disabilities were progressively moving towards being included more with students without disabilities, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was founded to accredit teacher certification programs at U.S. colleges and universities and ensure quality of preparation for educators.

### **1960s**

In viewing students with disabilities in a different light, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 Public Law 89-313. This law offered direct aid to states for educational purposes. In 1966 an amendment to the ESEA created a Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH), today known as Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011; Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). An amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act would follow in the 70s.

### **1970s**

In the early 1970s, as a result of many parents and organizations advocating for students with disabilities rights several significant court cases led to laws being put into motion that would catapult students with disabilities closer to the goal of inclusion (Yell, 2012). Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was replaced with the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA). It is important to note that the EHA expanded state and local funding which would include programs for the training of teachers of students with disabilities (Yell, 2012). Just as important were two landmark decisions in which action was brought against state statutes and policies that excluded students with disabilities. These two landmark cases were *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972) (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011; Yell, 2012). As a result, schools were required to provide educational services to students with disabilities and access to basic procedural rights of notice and hearings.

Continuing towards the goal of inclusion, a policy was established in 1973 to protect the rights of individuals with notable disabilities, as well as individuals with disabilities that may not be apparent (U.S. Department of Education, 2005) in programs receiving federal financial assistance. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 PL 93-112 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in any programming receiving federal funding. In addition, Section 504 ensures that students not eligible under IDEA have equal access to a free, appropriate public education, as well as an equal opportunity to participate in the same programs and activities; leveraging the playing field for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Yell, 2012). Therefore, in 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA or EHA, or Public Law PL 94-142) was enacted by the United States Congress. This act required all public schools accepting federal funds to provide equal access to education for children with physical and mental disabilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011; Yell, 2012). This historic legislation paved the way for students with disabilities to be educated with their non-disabled peers. PL 94-142 mandated that all children receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. Furthermore, this legislation also ensured the zero reject principle wherein all students with disabilities are eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Other principles from the law LRE include protection in evaluation, procedural safeguards, and parent participation. In 1997, IDEA was reauthorized to make further improvements such as strengthening the role of the parent, emphasizing student progress, and encouraging non-adversarial resolution of disputes by adding mediation procedures

(Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). As a result, Congress noted the results of students with disabilities accessing a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Thus meaning that students would participate in a “specially designed program that meets the individual needs of the student and allows them to receive an educational benefit” (Yell, 2012, p. 208).

### **1980s**

In 1983 *Roncker v. Walter* focused on bringing educational service to the child versus bringing the child to the services (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). As a result, the court ruled in favor of inclusive versus segregated placement and established a principle of portability. Portability within this context means “if a desirable service currently provided in a segregated setting can feasibly be delivered in an integrated setting, it would be inappropriate under PL 94-142 to provide the service in a segregated environment” (Yell, 2012, p. 276).

In 1984 the Vocational Education Act PL 98-524 required that vocational education be provided for students with disabilities. In 1986 the EAHCA was amended with the addition of the Handicapped Children’s Protection Act. “The case of *Smith v Robinson* (1984) nullified that courts prohibited awarding attorney’s fees in IDEA cases” (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011, p. 63). This amendment makes clear that students and parents have rights under EAHCA (now IDEA) and Section 504 to be awarded attorney’s fees and costs if successful in a court case under IDEA. In 1988 President Ronald Reagan established the President’s Committee on Employment of People with

Disabilities (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011). Thus, creating an avenue for maximum employment opportunities for people with disabilities (Civil Rights Directory, n.d.).

Later the 5th Circuit Court (1989) case of *Daniel R. R. v State Board of Education*, 874 F.2d 1036 would rule that a regular education placement is appropriate if a child with a disability can receive a satisfactory education, even if it is not the best academic setting for the child. Using the principles of “least restrictive environment” this case tested the criteria used to determine the appropriate placement for LRE. The test was based on the following two factors: (a) Can education in the regular classroom, with the use of supplementary aids and services be achieved satisfactorily for a particular student, and (b) If the student is to be removed from a regular education classroom and placed in a more restrictive setting, has the student been mainstreamed to the maximum extent appropriate (Karger, 2004). Therefore, it was determined that students with disabilities have a right to be included in both academic and extracurricular programs of general education. It was at this time that the court stated that academic achievement is not the only purpose for mainstreaming. However, placement of students with disabilities would continue to change very little (Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2002)

### **1990s**

In 1990 President George H. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act to guarantee equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodation, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications. Furthermore, in 1990 Congress passed PL 101-392 Carl D. Perkins Vocational Technical Education Act ensuring that individuals with disabilities have equal

access to programs and services within vocational systems. In 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act stated that school districts were now required to look at outcomes and assist students with disabilities in transitioning from high school to postsecondary life (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2011).

In 1997, the IDEA was reauthorized calling for students with disabilities to be included in state and district-wide assessments (Yell, 2012). Also, general education teachers were now required to be a member of the IEP team. This mandate created new roles and responsibilities for teachers in meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities (Yell, 2012). Furthermore, the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) emphasized the involvement of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum. As a result, “the 1990s led to the philosophy of inclusion being practiced more frequently, and students with disabilities being educated to the maximum extent possible in the general education classroom” (Swain et al., 2012, p. 75).

### **21st Century**

In 2002, George Bush signed and renamed ESEA to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In 2004 the reauthorization of IDEA implemented several changes from the 1997 reauthorization. The biggest changes called for more accountability at the state and local levels, as more data on outcomes is required. Another notable change involved school districts providing adequate instruction and intervention for students to avoid misidentification for special education services. Thus, the school based outcomes of these recent mandates resulted in increasing the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (McHatton & Parker, 2013). In addition, in 2010

President Barack Obama signed a bill replacing the term “mental retardation” with “intellectual disability” in all federal government acts and writings (Yell, 2012).

### **Emergence of Inclusion**

The rationale for inclusion undeniably stems from the Civil Rights Movement in which the segregation of children with disabilities in special classrooms resulted in both unequal educational opportunities and discrimination (Skrtic, Horn, & Clark, 2009; Swain et al., 2012; Yell, 2012). As more teachers and parents began to speak out about inclusion for both ethical and educational reasons, students were mainstreamed to have access to educational opportunities as their peers. Although the term mainstreaming does not appear in law, it refers to IDEA’s preference for the education of every child in the least restrictive environment for each student, while referring to the return of children with mild disabilities to a regular classroom for a portion of each school day (Council for Disability Rights, n.d.). However, segregating students with disabilities in special classrooms contradicted ideas of learning in diverse communities and failed to meet the promise to educate students in the least restricted environment (Kluth et al., 2003). This segregation caused concern about the disproportionate representation of students of color and poverty among those identified with disabilities contradicting the grounds on which inclusion is built (Artiles, Klinger, & Tate, 2006).

Inclusion policies are premised on the two critical beliefs that all children have a right to an equitable education and that in a democratic society there is value in working together in diverse settings (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009). In fact, Cipkin and Rizza (2009) and Hadadian and Chiang (2007) define inclusion as a commitment to educate



each child to the maximum extent appropriate in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend if the student had no special needs. In retrospect, because inclusive practices promote quality and equity education for all, the goal of inclusion is to eliminate all barriers to learning (Lipsky & Garther, 1998). On the contrary, Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008) state that this does not mean that general educators have fully embraced the idea of inclusion. However, successful implementation of inclusion programs depend on the attitudes of those who will work most closely with the students involved. Even though there is evidence that inclusion is a favorable environment for students with disabilities (Idol, 2006; McHatton & Parker, 2013), it has also been noted that there are various reasons for both positive and negative attitudes about inclusion (Brantlinger, 1996; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003).

### **Beginning Teachers Beliefs and Attitudes toward Inclusion**

Some researchers report that preservice teachers hold predetermined conceptions and beliefs about teaching (Brantlinger, 1996; Mintz, 2007; Richards & Clough, 2004). As such, these prior beliefs have a significant influence on shaping their teacher identity, university learning, classroom practice, and teaching implementation. Brantlinger (1996) reports that “during preparation preservice teachers’ beliefs seem to emerge out of the history of personal experiences, public and private school policies and practices, and independent conclusions” (p. 29). Furthermore, Brantlinger (1996) identified preservice teachers’ beliefs about student learning that would influence their support of inclusion. After observing 182 junior and senior special education preservice teachers at varying stages of their preparation in their natural setting (i.e., field experiences, instruction of

methods courses, oral conversations, and written narratives) data analysis was conducted. Contextualized data uncovered seven identified anti-inclusion belief categories (i.e., expectation that students achieve at grade level norms, disability status of students with disparate achievement levels, learning involves academic achievement that occurs in a developmentally linear patterns that parallel the sequence of levels of academic subjects, students learn best through individualized instruction, advantages of homogeneous and separated grouping, achievement differences attributed to motivation and parental attitudes toward education, and assumption of neutrality of educational structure and practice). As a result, 137 out of 182 participant beliefs were found to be detrimental to effective inclusive education. Therefore, Brantlinger concluded that teacher educators must consider the beliefs of preservice teachers during their preparation to work with students with disabilities.

Once in the role of a teacher, Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010) state that these beliefs and attitudes may negatively impact the quality of practice in the inclusion classroom. For example, Buford and Casey (2012) found in their investigation of the attitudes of Pre-K regular and special education teachers that teachers' beliefs of lack of support and training on inclusion caused negative attitudes towards inclusion. However, teachers younger than the age of 36 held more positive attitudes towards being prepared for inclusion. Also, Hammond and Ingalls (2003) found in their study on elementary teachers' attitudes, that teachers' belief of insufficient training and preparation was linked to negative attitudes and non-support/non-commitment of inclusion. Nonetheless, at least 50% of the teachers in their study believed most teachers were committed to

implementing inclusion programs and would make the necessary adjustments based on students' needs.

In contrast, Campbell et al. (2003) believe that teacher educators and their coursework shape teachers' beliefs. Many preservice teachers enter teacher education with extrinsic beliefs about classroom motivation which are often resistant to change (Garriott et al., 2003; Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Pendergast, Garris, & Keogh, 2011). Garriott and colleagues (2003) studied the beliefs of 239 male and female university students enrolled in their first teacher preparation course. A questionnaire was used with the participants to gather demographic information, and both forced choice and open-ended responses. Frequency and percentage data were calculated showing 60% of the females versus 43% males believed that students with mild disabilities should be placed in general education settings. A total of 131 preservice teachers (55%) believe students with mild disabilities should receive educational services in general education settings. In addition, 78% of preservice teachers believe that students with disabilities require more individualized attention. Therefore, noting that not only do students with disabilities need support but preservice teachers as well to provide that support. More clearly stated, Richards and Clough (2004) state that "moving from belief to practice requires skills, resources and support for success" (p. 83).

Lambe and Bones (2006) affirm that research is divided on how to promote positive attitudes among educators towards inclusion. For instance, when educators were trained in techniques for including students with special needs and sharing responsibilities with other educators, they reflected a more positive attitude (Henning &

Mitchell, 2002; Shade & Stewart, 2001; Swain et al., 2012). These attitudes were further influenced by the teachers' experiences and knowledge of the students with disabilities (Avramidis et al., 2000a; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Desimone, Maldonado, & Rodriguez, 2013; Garriott et al., 2003; Hsien, 2007). Garriott and colleagues (2003) stated that experiences allowed preservice teachers to alleviate the apprehensions of working with diverse populations. For example, Burke and Sutherland (2004) examined whether attitudes of both preservice and inservice teachers were affected by experiences, as well as knowledge of students with disabilities. A 12-item researcher created survey utilized a Likert-type scale to collect data on prior knowledge, training, preparation, effectiveness of inclusion, and willingness to teach students with disabilities. An analysis of the data indicated a significant correlation between preservice and inservice teachers and the positive effects of inclusion on students with disabilities. Preservice teachers indicated a stronger belief in preparation and training programs, knowledge of students with disabilities, and academic effectiveness of inclusion than inservice teachers. As a result, "this study indicates there may be negative attitudes toward students with disabilities and inclusion because teachers do not perceive that they have enough knowledge about inclusion" (Burke & Sutherland, 2004, p. 171).

Subsequently, studies have revealed that the negative attitudes of teachers are one of the main barriers to inclusion (Avramidis et al., 2000a; De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; Forlin, 2001). Likewise lack of confidence, inadequate knowledge about teaching techniques, classroom accommodations, and knowledge of disability characteristics for students with disabilities (Buford & Casey, 2012; Cook, 2001, 2002; Garriott et al., 2003;

Subban & Sharma, 2005) can also negatively affect teachers' attitudes. The degree to which general education teachers hold attitudes of attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection toward their students seems to directly affect the quality of students' educational experiences (Cook et al., 2000). However, the most important factor found to influence teachers' beliefs about inclusion is their direct experiences with inclusion (Avramidis et al., 2000a; Cook, 2002; Forlin, 2001; Garriott et al., 2003; Melnick & Meister, 2008). As a result, indicating that during teacher preparation and practice there are influential factors that affect preservice and inservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs toward inclusion.

### **Factors Influencing Beginning Teachers Attitudes toward Inclusion**

Some of the noted influential factors that affect teacher's attitudes include (a) student ability, (b) student behaviors, (c) classroom support, (d) time, and (e) insufficient training (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000b; Buford & Casey, 2012; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Cook, 2002; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; Salend, 2005; Sharma et al., 2008). Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart, and Eloff (2003) state that there is a greater likelihood that general education preservice teachers will be willing to work with students with disabilities if the proper training has occurred.

### **Student Ability**

Several studies indicate that preservice and inservice teachers perceive students with disabilities as having lowered academic goals (Davis & Layton, 2011; DeSimone, Maldonado, & Rodriguez, 2013). Both preservice and inservice teachers perceive

students with disabilities as being less accountable with lower work expectations and goals than their nondisabled peers (Campbell et al., 2003; Davis & Layton, 2011; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). This in turn causes a negative attitude towards inclusion. However, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) as stated in McHatton and Parker (2013) explain that teachers may be more willing to include students with certain types of disabilities versus those with more challenging behaviors (Cook, 2001; DeSimone et al., 2013; Subban & Sharma, 2006). Avramidis and Norwich (2002), Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996), and Sharma and colleagues (2008) voiced that preservice teachers were more willing to include students who have mild disabilities and non-emotional behavioral disorders. For example, Cook (2001) found a correlation between teachers' descriptions of students and the attitudinal category (e.g., attachment, concern, indifference, and rejection) in which they were nominated. As a result, teachers' perceptions of severity of disability influenced the attitudes held towards inclusion of students with disabilities. In a recent review of the literature on inclusion attitudes of general and special education preservice teachers, McHatton and Parker (2013) assessed teacher candidate's perceptions of inclusion using the *Attitudes Toward Inclusion* survey at the end of orientation and at their last class meeting. Statistical and descriptive results revealed that regardless of disability, 66.7% special education preservice teachers and 81.3% general education preservice teachers agreed that students with disabilities can be educated in the general education classroom. However, when the level of disability was changed to a specific disability (e.g., behavioral, cognitive) the percentage of positive responses decreased. In a similar fashion, these results mirror DeSimone et al. (2013)

findings of a study conducted with novices and practitioners about inclusion; in which respondents strongly agreed or agreed in their willingness to include students with mild disabilities (95%) or learning disabilities (89.5%). While one-fourth of the respondents were undecided about included students with autism, intellectual disabilities and sensory impairments. In addition, 22.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: Students with emotional/behavioral disorders do not belong in a general education classroom.

### **Student Behaviors**

According to Romi and Leyser (2006), Shade and Stewart (2001), and Salend (2005), additional attention and support is sometimes needed to assist some students that present more challenging behaviors and learning differences than their nondisabled peers. To foster positive attitudes towards inclusion, teacher educators must be sure to expose general education preservice and inservice teachers to different types of disabilities while training them to properly implement strategies and interventions (Avramidis et al., 2000b; Cook, 2002; Forlin, 2001; Hastings & Oakford, 2003). For instance, Hastings and Oakford (2003) designed and used a rating scale, the Impact of Inclusion Questionnaire (IIQ), with 93 university students studying for professional teaching qualifications. The two part questionnaire encouraged participants to share information about their experience with special needs, as well as gathered demographic data. With each item on the IIQ rated on a seven point scale, a total of twenty four items were rated. Hastings and Oakford (2003) randomly distributed two versions of the IIQ. The first version, concentrating on the impact of including students with intellectual disabilities and the

second focusing on the impact of including students with emotional and or behavioral problems. Results indicated that student teachers expressed more negative attitudes towards including students with emotional and behavioral problems than they did towards students with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, Avramidis et al. (2000b) found, through the use of a compilation of questions influenced by the Opinion Relative to Mainstreaming (ORM) scale as well as Likert-type scale questions measuring intentions, emotional reactions, feelings, and perceptions that students with emotional and behavioral difficulties caused more concern and stress for preservice teachers than students with other types of disabilities. While researchers have documented that student behavior causes concern for preservice teachers, Melnick and Meister (2008) note that beginning teachers share those same concerns. Therefore, suggesting that teachers with more experience in the classroom demonstrate the confidence that is needed to deal with student behaviors.

### **Classroom Support**

Hammond and Ingalls (2003) state that teachers believe that the support they receive from administrators is critical in implementing inclusive practices. Therefore, administrative support plays a significant role in determining teacher attitudes toward inclusion because of the reaffirmation of a positive learning environment (Hwang & Evans, 2011; Idol, 1994; Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011). Likewise, Lohrmann and Bambara (2006) stated overall school support as a critical agent in fostering acceptance of inclusion school wide. For example, Lambe and Bones (2006) examined a sample group of 41 out of a cohort of 125 preservice teachers who completed a survey, as well as



participated in asynchronous and synchronous discussions related to beliefs, experiences, and attitudes towards inclusion. As a result, one of the common themes that emerged was that preservice teachers felt that successful inclusion relied on support of the classroom assistant. This was in agreement with Richards and Clough's (2004) post experience views of preservice teachers that successful inclusion stems from help from the learning support assistant. Their study administered two questionnaires to 120 student teachers to examine (a) students' knowledge and understanding of inclusion the first week of the program and (b) experiences in program at the end of the one year program. Pre-experience views "indicated a positive approach to inclusion, with seventy-seven participants describing it in terms of rights, offering equality for all children to be actively involved" (Richards & Clough, 2004, pp. 79–80).

Additional concerns expressed by general education preservice and inservice teachers in reference to support were the need for individualized programs, adapted resources, additional knowledge and skills (McCray & McHatton, 2011; Rozenweig, 2009; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012; Youngs et al., 2011) and on-going training (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Melnick & Meister, 2008). In fact, McCray and McHatton (2011) examined the differences in perceptions, as well as perceptions of inclusion of students with disabilities in a general education classroom, of 115 preservice teachers. The 77 elementary majors and 38 secondary education majors were enrolled in a course that addressed the roles and responsibilities of teachers in inclusion (i.e., integrating exceptional students in general education classrooms). Without defining the term inclusion, surveys were administered during class pre and post the course and consisted

of 22 Likert-type questions and five open-ended questions. Fifty-five of the participants expressed the need for support in knowledge and skills, while one-third stated the need for strategies and methods. Acquiring more knowledge of different categories of exceptionality, as well as meeting diverse needs was also a necessary area of support (McCray & McHatton, 2011). On the contrary, those who felt inclusion was not successful believed that it was not only due to lack of support, but also having to operate within limited time constraints (Richards & Clough, 2004).

The same outcomes were also found in studies conducted with beginning general education teachers. Hwang and Evans (2011) used a questionnaire to examine the attitudes of general education teachers of three primary schools in Seoul, Republic of Korea. As a result, most teachers expressed that for inclusion to be successful, more support and resources (i.e., teaching materials, smaller class size) were needed. Likewise, Buford and Casey's study (2012), teachers agreed that they had the support of their peers when working with students with disabilities in the general education classroom. As a result, Shady, Luther, and Richman (2013) state it is important to recognize that teachers cannot simply be told to teach in inclusive settings without the support and guidance (p. 187).

### **Time**

According to Avramidis and colleagues (2000b) and Hwang and Evans (2011) preservice and inservice teachers express their uneasiness regarding time and skill set. McHatton and Parker (2013) concur in that time and logistics are contributing factors to teachers' attitudes. Time was also stated as an issue in IHE support for developing

collaborative initiatives and courses across discipline to assist with the preparation of preservice teachers (Harvey et al., 2010).

Having the availability of time to instruct students without disabilities was another concern towards implementing successful inclusion (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009), as it was perceived that students with disabilities would require more attention. In fact, Lambe and Bones (2006), Lohrmann and Bambara (2006) and Swain and colleagues (2012) state that providing adequate attention, planning, and time management are key challenges faced by teachers. For instance, Swain and colleagues (2012) used a modified version of the Attitude Towards Inclusion Instrument (ATII) (Yates, 1995) to conduct a study with undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory special education course both pre and post instruction. All of the participants had been admitted to the College of Education and had passed a pre professional skills test, completed an introduction to education course, as well as a human growth and learning course. In addition, all preservice teachers were involved in a 20-hour field experience which allowed for observation and working with students with disabilities in both a general and special education setting.

Fifty-four percent of the participants were elementary majors and the majority of the students were in their junior and senior year. The survey was accessed online the first two weeks, as well as the last two weeks of the semester. Out of 1,212 participants, 1,002 responded. Subsequently, 777 participants responded pre and post, establishing the final information to be used in the analysis. Repeated measures *t* test revealed that four main themes emerged, one of which was a shift in students beliefs over the course of the

semester regarding the amount of time needed to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. Hence, preservice teachers began to see the importance of their role in providing accommodations for students with disabilities. This concurred with Horne and Timmons's (2009) and Shady et al.'s (2013) reports of lack of time for collaborating, planning, attending inclusion meetings, and meeting all of the students' educational needs.

### **Insufficient Training**

Carroll, Forlin, and Jobling (2003) express that due to limitations in existing teacher training programs there is an imperative need for more training. Although many institutions of higher education (IHE) offer coursework in special education (e.g., inclusive practices) for general education preservice teachers (Romi & Leyser, 2006), many preparation programs continue to use a separate training model (Carroll et al., 2003). This concurs with Kosko and Wilkins's (2009) findings which indicate that general education teachers take few courses that provide instructional strategies for working with students with disabilities. In fact, preservice teachers indicated insufficient training on a modified version of the *Interactions with Disabled Persons Scale* (IDP) administered by Carroll and colleagues (2003). The IDP was administered to 220 preservice teacher pre and post a 10-week special education course (i.e., one-hour lecture and two-hour tutorial per week) focusing on students with disabilities. The IDP entails 20 questions ranking preservice teachers' level of discomfort when interacting with a person with a disability. Descriptive statistics suggested that the level of preservice teacher discomfort when meeting a person with a disability decreased following training.

Therefore, indicating that as the amount of contact increased the level of discomfort lessened. Similarly, Horne and Timmons (2009) report that training was a major concern of 85% of participants in their study addressing teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of children with special needs in the regular classroom. Although, positive attitudes were expressed on *The School and the Education of All Students Scale* (SEAS) and interview questions, teachers were still concerned with implementing individualized instruction with such a diverse group of students. Therefore, general and special education preservice teachers, as well as their instructors, must demonstrate accountability in inclusion (Cooper et al., 2008). In order to demonstrate this responsibility, preservice teachers must be given opportunities during their teacher preparation to reflect and be assessed on theory and practice.

Similarly, once in the classroom, general education teachers generally express that they do not have adequate training for working with students with disabilities (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). Thus, indicating that new teachers must be trained in research-based instructional methods to meet the needs of a heterogeneous classroom (Hudson & Glomb, 1997; Jobling & Moni, 2004; McHatton & McCray, 2007; Shippen et al., 2005; Yell et al., 2006).

### **Teacher Preparation and Competency Standards**

Because of the increasing number of students with disabilities in schools, there is a need to prepare more "highly qualified" teachers (Cooper et al., 2008; Department of Education, 2002). Highly qualified, as defined by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) when used with respect to an elementary school teacher who is new to the profession, means

that the teacher holds at least a bachelor's degree; and has demonstrated, by passing a rigorous State test, subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of basic elementary school curriculum (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2014). Hence, many institutions of higher education, school districts, and state departments of education around the country are taking another look at the criteria that defines teachers as such.

It is with this reasoning Cooper and colleagues (2008) suggest that teacher education programs take a critical look at performance standards as they relate to preparing more effective teachers to work with students with varying educational needs. With this construct in mind, many programs have realigned their teacher preparation programs to offer an opportunity for all teacher candidates to obtain content and pedagogical knowledge, utilize current evidence-based practice, and make ethical decisions in a changing and culturally diverse world (Council for Exceptional Children, 2000; NCATE, 2014; Wise, 2004), at the same time making adjustments in the quality of programming used to prepare preservice teachers to ensure more qualified teachers (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011; National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education, 2010; Winter, 2006). With this said, many teacher education programs have aligned their programs with state and national standards that require teacher candidates to demonstrate an expected level of knowledge and skill set (National Council on Teacher Quality, n.d.).

For instance, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developed a set of professional standards around ten content areas that describe the minimum knowledge,

skills, and dispositions shared by all special educators working with students with disabilities. These content standards focus on the areas of: (a) foundations (i.e., philosophical, historical, and legal), (b) development and characteristics of learners, (c) individual learning differences, (e) instructional strategies, (f) learning environments and social interactions, (g) language, (h) instructional planning, (i) assessment, (j) professional and ethical practice, and (k) collaboration.

As a result of the passage of PL 94-142 there was a renewal of professional standards in special education (Zionts, Shellady, & Zionts, 2006). Hence, educator preparation programs leading to undergraduate and graduate teacher licenses were required to align with the State Board adopted North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards (NCPTS) and appropriate evaluation instruments. In addition, teaching candidates were required to meet performance expectations that are aligned with standards, principles, or core propositions from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission (NCPTSC), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (CEC, 2000; INTASC, 2011; NCDPI, n.d.).

Dingle, Falvey, Givner, and Haager (2004) state that similar competencies, knowledge, and skills are needed by both general and special education teachers to work with a diverse population. Therefore a common set of standards was developed by INTASC (2001). For instance, standards such as demonstrating leadership skills, establishing a respectful environment for a diverse population of students, know the content they teach, facilitate learning for students, and reflect on their practice. However,

preservice teacher attitudes towards and perceptions of preparedness for inclusion relates to being able to demonstrate Standard II, which is establishing a respectful environment for a diverse population. In addition, preservice teachers should be able to demonstrate pedagogical knowledge, skills, and techniques of providing a positive, nurturing environment that fosters respect, inclusiveness, support, flexibility, and is inviting for a diverse population of students. Also, inclusive of this standard is the demonstrated ability to share in the responsibility of educating the students by collaborating with parents, community and others in the profession, while appreciating differences and maintaining high expectations for all students. As a result of preservice teachers demonstrating their achievement of a given set of competencies, standards, and dispositions, the impression of being adequately prepared to implement inclusive practices is given. However, once teacher practices begin in the classroom there is still question if the full context of inclusion is understood (Swain et al., 2012).

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBTS) provides a teacher-developed and teacher-driven, rigorous and comprehensive program. Its purpose is to examine preservice programs in the 21st century and how those programs should be evaluated and the resources needed to ensure that every child has high quality teaching. While skills and knowledge are at the core of teaching and teaching preparation, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT, 2012) believes that teaching itself has a moral core connected to values of equity and opportunity, dignity, and democracy. Therefore, AFT requirements of professional teachers include knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Similarly, principles and standards for effective teacher preparation include knowledge of



how children learn and develop, the ability to teach academic content to diverse groups of students, using culturally responsive practices, and active effective and ethical collaboration.

Along the same lines, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2010) states that teacher candidates know the content that they plan to teach and can explain important principles and concepts delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. Therefore, all teacher candidates must develop proficiencies for working effectively with students and families from diverse populations and with exceptionalities to ensure that all students learn. Also, teacher candidates must develop knowledge of diversity, dispositions that respect and value differences, and skills for working with diverse populations. In turn, field experiences and clinical practice support the development of educators who can apply their knowledge of diversity, including exceptionalities, to work in schools with all students. NCATE also encourages opportunities to reflect on observations and practices.

NCATE exemplifies what is important to teacher preparation by promoting high quality teacher preparation and professional accreditation standards. Successfully meeting those standards provides a twofold benefit in that it provides (1) accreditation to schools of education and (2) qualified educators that are able to help students learn. For this reason, general and special education preservice teachers in training, as well as their instructors, must demonstrate accountability in inclusive practices (Cooper et al., 2008). In order to demonstrate this responsibility, preservice teachers must be given opportunities during their teacher preparation to reflect and be assessed on theory and

practice and in turn successfully demonstrate the effectiveness of their teacher preparation.

### **Overview of Beginning Teacher Preparation for Inclusion**

Preparing teachers for general education classrooms has undergone a major pedagogical shift in recent years (Forlin, 2010; Mukhopadhyay & Molosiwa, 2010). In fact, now that roles and responsibilities of teachers have changed for students with disabilities, preparing for these diverse roles is what determines the success of implementing inclusive practices. However, Harvey et al. (2010) found that inclusion is inadequately addressed and often neglected in teacher training. So, Harvey and colleagues (2010) examined differences in perceptions of inclusive teacher education programming by department, differences in faculty expectations or experiences with inclusion, and perceived issues of preservice teacher preparation and program practices. Using a five point Likert-type scale, *The Preservice Teacher Preparation for Inclusion Assessment Survey* (Harvey et al., 2010) and open-ended questions, a pilot study was conducted in 2004 and then implemented in 2005. Out of a national sample of 703 identified participants, 124 were acceptable. Descriptive and nonparametric inferential statistics indicated that “IHE’s could better facilitate cross-articulation and training efforts concerning inclusion for preservice teacher education programs by coordinating course requirements, greater awareness of special education and collaboration, and providing more field experiences” (Harvey et al., 2010, p. 30). Likewise, Subban and Sharma (2005) reported the need for additional training and the concern for lack of personal experience was a consistent theme expressed by teachers. The purpose of study

conducted by Subban and Sharma (2005) was to determine teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education. Ten participants were randomly chosen to participate from a larger number of schools and teachers. Responses to semi-structured interviews were analyzed for themes and patterns. Although it was found that preservice teachers held positive attitudes toward inclusion, the need for more information, knowledge and expertise and training was articulated. Rosenzweig (2009) addresses this theme and states that it is imperative that university programs not assume that future teachers know what inclusion encompasses. Training for inclusive practices must provide teacher candidates with knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of students through collaborative work, which is recommended to be an essential component of teacher preparation programs (Garriott et al., 2003). Hsien (2007) states that "preservice teacher training may be the most appropriate and effective platform in shaping teacher attitudes toward inclusion, as they may not have had to cope with additional educational demands" (p. 54). Teacher training programs also must include development and maintenance of positive teacher beliefs, which later transform into an individual's values (Brandes & Crowson, 2009; Proctor & Niemeyer, 2001). Thus, in many higher education institutions, special and general educators have started communicating with outside sources to reshape their professional preparation programs to prepare future teachers for the challenges they will face in the 21st century inclusive setting (Bassey, 1997; Villa, Thousand, & Chapple, 1996), including coursework, field-based experiences, and support. McCray and McHatton (2011) support this in their recommendations to assist with the lack of preparation by suggesting to include: preparation and opportunities for collaboration;

structured and supported field experiences; and infusion of special education content in methods courses to ensure students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum. Within each of these components, teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions played a vital role in the how favorably inclusive practices were employed and possibly sustained (Shade & Stewart, 2001; Shippen et al., 2005; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). Thus, indicating that the beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, knowledge, and skills of preservice teachers are critical to teacher preparedness to implement inclusive practices (Subban & Sharma, 2006).

### **Course Work**

Scheeler (2008) and Melnick and Meister (2008) report that skills and techniques that teachers learn and practice in college classrooms are not always maintained over time, nor do these skills transfer to actual classrooms and students. Through university offered course work preservice teachers have the opportunity to learn about not only the type of students they will encounter, but the instructional strategies that are effective with diverse learners. Research indicates that some general education teachers do not take or were never offered courses on teaching students with disabilities (Biddle, 2006; Boyer & Bandy, 1997; Cameron & Cook, 2007; Kosko & Wilkins, 2009) and the courses that are taken quite often do not provide instructional strategies (Hsien, 2007; Kosko & Wilkins, 2009). Rosenzweig (2009) concurs that educators can only understand how to differentiate instruction if they are given specific strategies and techniques that can be used for teaching students with a variety of needs. As stated by Washburn-Moses (2008), due to the restructuring of the special education practice and the demand of teacher

preparation programs to produce quality teachers, it is now crucial for preparation programs to be well rounded. Further, Cooper and colleagues (2008) address a solution to this concern in that teacher education programs must examine their performance standards in demonstrating preparation of effective teachers for diverse learners.

Campbell et al. (2003), Carroll et al. (2003), Cook (2002), and Kim (2011) concluded that general education preservice teachers' participation in special education coursework would be beneficial related to attitudes. However, Tait and Purdie (2000) report that course work did not have any significant effect on positive attitudes toward disability and could be partially explained by changes in preservice teachers' knowledge through the teacher education program. Subsequently, there continues to be a need to increase the knowledge and skills of general education teachers in order to employ effective instructional strategies for teaching children with disabilities (Washburn-Moses, 2008). As a result, more preparation programs are now infusing special education content into general education courses that are being offered to both general and special education preservice teachers (Harvey et al., 2010); simultaneously building on the missing puzzle pieces of inclusion.

Hence, teacher education courses need to provide an increased exposure to a range of educational settings so that preservice teachers are better prepared for an inclusive classroom. Support for this can be found in the work of Tait and Purdie (2000), Kurz and Paul (2005), and Sharma and colleagues (2006), who point out the advantages gained by working with students particularly in general education classrooms.

**Field-based Experiences**

Many preservice teachers believe that experience is the best teacher (Golder, Jones, & Quinn, 2009; Joram & Gabriele, 1998). However, Lancaster and Bain (2007) indicate that a small percentage of preservice teachers have prior experience with students with disabilities. Teacher education faculty should consider the value of introducing meaningful opportunities for interacting and working with individuals with disabilities that involve more reflective practice and real experiences (Walkington, 2007). These opportunities may enhance greater awareness of the needs of students with disabilities and improve preservice teacher comfort working with students with disabilities, especially for general education teachers (Carroll et al., 2003). Field experiences provide an avenue for developing additional strategies and instructional skills to be obtained (Golder et al., 2009). “As teacher education programs shift to a more performance based evaluation approach of teacher candidates, adjustments in the college curriculum will need to be made” (Shippen et al., 2005, p. 20) such as that of infusing special education content with general education curriculum and providing a variety of field experiences.

**Support for Teachers**

In order for teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students, varied strategies and supports must be obtained. Lack of adequate support services and teachers’ concerns about insufficient training and preparation in the skills required to implement inclusive educational practice create stress for general education teachers (Campbell et al., 2003; Rosenzweig, 2009). In the same fashion, this lack of support was voiced by preservice

teachers in research done in the United Kingdom (Richards & Clough, 2004) as well as the United States (Kozleski, Pugach, Yinger, 2002). One support theme that evolved from studies of Allday and colleagues (2013) and Angelides (2008) included the requirement for collaborative experiences and partnerships with special and general educators, family, and community members (Boyer & Bandy; 1997; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that all stakeholders be aware of their roles in the inclusive setting.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

As novice teachers enter the classroom they must construct an understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Rosenzweig, 2009; Youngs et al., 2011). As suggested by the literature, DeSimone and Parmar (2006) and Hunter-Johnson et al. (2014), these roles and responsibilities are often fostered by different and previous experiences, beliefs, perceptions, training, and interactions with mentors and colleagues. However, as the roles and responsibilities of general and special education teachers change it is hard to establish a mutual vision to effectively teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Cooper et al., 2008, p. 157). Now that the role of the general education teacher is expanding with regard to involvement in the educational programs of students with disabilities, teachers must now possess the beliefs, attitudes, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to be confident, effective teachers of students with widely varying abilities and achievement levels, including students with educational disabilities (Berry, 2008, p. 1151).

## **Collaboration**

Inclusion challenges general and special education teachers to share in the responsibility of providing an appropriate educational program for students with disabilities (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003, p. 25). Therefore, Henning and Mitchell (2002) believe that one of the best strategies for effectively serving children in inclusive settings is collaborative planning between general and special educators to jointly serve students with disabilities. Likewise, Hwang and Evans (2011) note that collaboration between general and special education teachers is a major factor in the success of inclusion (p. 9). However, the majority of the general education teachers in their study (72.41%) were neutral regarding the effectiveness of their communication with special education teachers. Along the same lines, teachers voiced a concern about inadequate levels of collaboration and support of fellow teachers (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Given that collaboration requires high-level interactive skills (Brownwell et al., 2005) and is a powerful predictor of favorable attitudes toward inclusion (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014), careful instruction in these skills seems necessary. Therefore, indicating that providing teacher candidates with knowledge and skills to meet the diverse needs of students through collaborative work becomes an essential component of teacher preparation programs (Garriott et al., 2003). Certainly, collaboration encourages educators to reflect on inclusive practices that will break down barriers that have blocked access to equal educational opportunities. Furthermore, collaboration is emphasized by researchers in the United States (Allday et al., 2013; Harvey et al., 2010; Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006; Shippen et al., 2005) as well as scholars who study abroad (Angelides, 2008).



For example, Angelides (2008) investigated student teacher practices, activities, and behaviors in inclusive education. A qualitative analysis of 10 fourth year student teachers' responses to open-ended initial interviews, observations, follow-up interviews, and field notes, revealed that while all of the student teachers showed positive attitudes towards all students, barriers such as differentiating curriculum and ensuring student participation arose. As a result, certain patterns of inclusive behavior emerged and the student teachers collaborated with parents, special education teachers, and administration with the "aims of increasing participation, decreasing marginalization and providing equal opportunities to teaching and learning to all children" (Angelides, 2008, p. 326). On the contrary, Allday and colleagues (2013) and Harvey et al. (2010) found that very few universities are requiring preservice teachers to take a collaboration course. Therefore novice teachers must be trained for collaboration in order to work with other teachers and service providers involved in the educational process (Shippen et al., 2005).

As previously stated, in order to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher preparation programs should offer comprehensive training and opportunities for field-experiences in order for teacher candidates to acquire the confidence, knowledge, and skill base needed to effectively work with parents and other professionals as they prepare for inclusion. While coursework, field experiences, and teacher support are all vital parts of teacher preparation, the criteria by which these components are performed and measured weigh heavily on the perceived preparedness of inclusive practices and cannot be overlooked.

Likewise, as schools seek to support students with disabilities in the general education setting, co-teaching has become the common service delivery model (Friend & Cook, 2007). However, many teachers do not fully embrace co-teaching. Kloo and Zigmond (2008) and Rea and Connell (2005) state that general and special education teachers indicate they are both unprepared and unskilled for the challenges of serving students with disabilities in the general education classroom, as it relates to co-teaching.

### **Effectiveness of Teacher Preparation for Inclusion**

Preservice teacher education programs are now required to produce graduates who are able to respond to diverse student populations in their general education classrooms (Loreman, 2002). Many institutions have done so and continue to adjust their pre-service programs to address issues of inclusion. Sosu, Mtika, and Colucci-Gray (2010) found that teacher preparation programs are not efficiently equipped with courses that adequately prepare general education teachers to teach in inclusive classroom settings. Using a mixed method design, Sosu and colleagues (2010) obtained data from two cohorts of student teachers to address if there were any differences between entry and exiting student teachers' beliefs about inclusion. While overall responses from entry and exit cohorts were positive towards inclusion, data revealed final year teachers held a stronger inclusive mindset than first year entry cohorts. Subsequently, there was a difference in educational justice and learning expectations of student teachers. Overall, final year students held significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusion than first year student teachers, thus suggesting that special education courses affect teacher attitudes (Campbell et al., 2003; Sharma et al., 2006; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). As a

result, preservice teachers who may lack knowledge in instructional strategies, classroom management, and disabilities would become more comfortable working with students with disabilities in inclusive settings. For example, Shippen and colleagues (2005) and Shade and Stewart (2001) found that after taking an introductory course on the needs of students with disabilities, general education preservice teachers felt less anxious about inclusion. Therefore, it is important to know that when these components are left unmanaged in teacher preparation, incorrect conceptualizations are formed regarding attitudes toward and beliefs about students with disabilities (Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kosko & Wilkins, 2009).

McHatton and Parker (2013) state that the research literature primarily focuses on the role of coursework as a means of exposing general education preservice teachers to students with disabilities. For example, Buford and Casey (2012) state that coursework informs teachers of the accommodations and adaptations that are needed to successfully work with students with disabilities. In fact, in an investigation of attitudes of teachers regarding their preparedness to teach students with special needs, (22%) of participants reported having no special education courses (Buford & Casey, 2012). Both general and special education teachers are challenged by the idea of including students with disabilities into the general curriculum, as well as how to meet such diverse needs. With this said, the question remains are teacher education programs as effective as they could be for preparing their graduates for inclusion?

### **Beginning Teacher Perceptions of Inclusion**

Because teaching is a profession in which teacher candidates bring with them preconceived ideas and practices (Joram & Gabriele, 1998; Kroll, 2004), opportunities must be provided to acquire the skills and wisdom to develop new pedagogical knowledge in order to redirect these preconceptions. Kosko and Wilkins (2009) and McHatton and Parker (2013) state there are mixed perceptions or “beliefs” about inclusion. For instance, Kosko and Wilkins (2009) investigated ways in which the amount of training and experience related to general education teachers’ self-perceived skills in adapting instruction for students with disabilities. Data from general education teachers who participated in a larger study the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) were used (Carlson, Brauen, Klein, Schroll, & Willig, 2002). Participants answered both interview and Likert type questions related to skill in adapting instruction, preservice preparation received in adapting instruction, and numbers of hours of professional development. Results indicated that the amount of professional development was statistically significant and positively related to teachers’ perceived ability to adapt instruction (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009, p. 7). Although many teachers perceive that they are well prepared for their first year of teaching in an inclusive setting; research states the opposite (Busch et al., 2001). An example of this was found in an interview with a first year teacher in which Busch and colleagues (2001) indicate that although the teacher felt prepared (i.e., experience working with students with disabilities, completed licensure program, feedback from professors); areas that could have been improved in her preparation for inclusion included behavior management,

analyzing the IEP, and managing and coordinating with the paraprofessional and assessment techniques

### **Beginning Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness**

Because teachers are now being challenged to meet higher standards of teaching, perceptions of preparedness are indicated by self-efficacy and the extent to which teacher preparation programs have prepared them (Loreman, Sharma, & Forlin, 2013). The concept of self-efficacy is unclear and at best implies the belief that a person can be good at virtually all things (Lancaster & Bain, 2007). Nevertheless, the attitudes and self-efficacy of general education teachers working with students with disabilities has been a concern for education. Several studies (Lancaster & Bain, 2007; Macmillan & Meyer, 2006; Romi & Leyser, 2006) have shown that preservice teachers express feelings of anxiety about implementing skills such as adjusting curriculum, differentiating instruction, and adopting pedagogical methods that meet the needs of diverse learners. Likewise, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) found from a synthesis of research that about one-fourth to one-third of 10, 560 general education teachers believed that they were adequately prepared to teach students with disabilities. As a result, teachers sometimes view themselves as under-trained and under-skilled (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

There appears to be certain aspects of teacher education programs that enable the pre-service teachers to view themselves as competent when it came to adjusting their teaching practice to teach a wider range of students. Kosko and Wilkins (2009) found that the more hours of professional development teachers have the more competent they believe they are to adapt instruction for students with disabilities. However, Lancaster

and Bain (2007) found that pre-service teacher measures of self-efficacy correlated with their level of participation in an inclusive education course. Also, lack of efficacy may be a factor that creates concern for teachers regarding inclusive education because of their lack of training and education about inclusion (Hsien, 2007). Therefore, beginning teachers may feel more effective in implementing inclusive practices if they have had the opportunity for inclusion experiences before entering the classroom.

Because there continues to be a concern with the implementation of inclusive practices, especially with general education teachers, we must continue to examine the missing components which preservice teachers are lacking as they transition into the classroom from preparation to practice. As McHatton and McCray (2007) report, when general education teachers are faced with the demands of the inclusive setting, sense of teaching self-efficacy decrease as a result of limited preparation (Boling, 2007; Hastings & Oakford, 2003). With the same regard, teachers conveyed feelings of unpreparedness when differentiating instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). Therefore, teacher educators must understand the needs of preservice teachers and emphasize the importance of being skilled in inclusive practices (Pugach, 2005).

### **Support**

As beginning teachers carry out their first years of teaching it is important that they receive the necessary support to sustain and implement skills and knowledge acquired during preservice and inservice. Support received from colleagues and teacher educators is also important. Establishing relationships with these individuals serves as a

source for knowledge and skills when working with students with disabilities through sharing experiences (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006), resources, challenges (Brantlinger, 1996), and teaching strategies. Furthermore, teacher educators can offer support through casual explanation of issues so they can construct their own ideological positions (O'Hanlon, 2003). Collaboration and co-teaching are various means by which support can be provided to novice teachers. Also, Youngs et al. (2011) indicate the important role administration plays in providing not only school based support for inclusion, but also providing the time, resources, and guidance required to implement these skills. Therefore, it is just as important that beginning teachers have access to on-going training and professional development opportunities to provide the support that is necessary to further shape and maintain the understanding of inclusion.

### **On-going Training and Professional Development**

Learning and professional development occur throughout teachers' careers. Originating with preservice teachers' field experiences, training is interwoven with beginning teachers' induction. Therefore, in order for beginning teachers to effectively implement inclusive practices sufficient preparation must be executed. It is important to note that several studies reflect that although teachers support inclusion, they have not received adequate training during preservice preparation or sustained training during inservice (Buford & Casey, 2012; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Kosko & Wilkins, 2009). According to Hastings and Oakford (as cited in Buford & Casey, 2012), "in order for teachers to provide a variety of accommodations, they needed ongoing professional development opportunities to continue developing their

skills” (p. 18). Equally important, Avramidis et al. (2000b) found that higher levels of professional development affected the attitudes and confidence levels of teachers in a positive manner. By the same token DeSimone et al. (2013) stated that teachers develop negative attitudes toward inclusion when they are placed in classrooms without proper training (p. 13). In particular, Hunter-Johnson et al. (2014) acknowledge that because attitudes play an integral role in the successful implantation of inclusive education (p.12), consistent professional development would affect teachers’ attitudes more positively. Therefore, if inclusion is to work, new teachers must be trained to recognize and meet the needs of their students (Biddle, 2006).

### **Conclusion**

The research presented in this review suggests that beginning elementary education teachers’ beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions play an important role in their successful implementation of inclusive practices (Buford & Casey, 2012; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; DeSimone et al., 2013; Hsien, 2007). Furthermore, positive attitudes toward inclusion predict a willingness to work in inclusive context with a stronger sense of personal efficacy (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009; McHatton & Parker, 2013). For this reason IHEs have made a pedagogical shift of including more inclusive content (Forlin, Sharma, & Loreman, 2012). Researchers indicate that teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion are more apt to make the necessary adjustments to instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students (Campbell et al., 2003; Forlin, 2010; Sharma et al., 2006; Swain et al., 2012; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). Swain and colleagues (2012) stated, “these peers can often influence peers to include students with disabilities” (p. 76).



In a like manner, research indicates that there are specific skills and knowledge base needed to work in an inclusive setting (Hodkinson, 2005). Subsequently, it has been stated that beginning elementary education teachers lack these skills and knowledge base to implement effective inclusive practices (Forlin, 2001; Melnick & Meister, 2008). However, as teachers demonstrate their need and desires for information about students with disabilities and best instructional practices to create equal educational opportunities, teacher educators must create a space where voices are welcomed and heard (Lynch, 2012) and begin to provide the support, such as mentors, collaborative partnerships, professional development and ,experiences needed to accomplish this goal. Therefore, Burke and Sutherland (2004) express that instruction must be provided to general and special education teachers so that a common understanding of inclusion can be established. In fact, Boe, Shin, and Cook (2007), Sharma and colleagues (2006), and Youngs and colleagues (2011), state that both IHEs and teacher candidates play an active part in making inclusion successful. As a result, successful inclusion teachers possess the belief that all children can learn (Viteritti, 2004) and should have the opportunity to become the best individual that they can be.

Additionally, there is a growing concern internationally about whether the preparation pre-service teachers receive for inclusion is adequate (Lancaster & Bain, 2007). In fact, some of the missing components on preservice and inservice teacher preparation reflect that institutions of higher education should consider the demographics (e.g., gender, religion, culture, experience) that play an important part in preservice teachers' interactions with students with disabilities (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). In

particular, cultural barriers must be acknowledged and discussed so that prior beliefs and stereotypes can be eradicated. Equally important, new teachers must be trained in research-validated practices and effective collaboration skills (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003). Additionally, McHatton and Parker (2013) state providing cross-departmental experiences not only emphasizes collaboration across disciplines, but also provides an opportunity for preservice teachers to “work in a shared space while maximizing each other’s expertise” (p. 187). This collaborative initiative across disciplines is supported by Melnick and Meister (2008) and Buford and Casey (2012) in which it has been suggested that teaching programs need to prepare teachers to work with all children.

Taylor and Ringlaben (2012) report limited information about how these new teacher educator programs influence preservice teachers’ confidence or attitudes toward inclusive education as future teachers. More research is needed to examine the relationship between changes in attitudes toward special education and the likelihood of preservice teachers taking more courses in special education or majoring in special education (Swain et al., 2012). As a result, preservice teachers will be provided opportunities to build their confidence and develop more positive attitudes toward inclusion. Likewise, Shady and colleagues (2013) voice that because general education teachers take introductory special education courses, if any at all, they have difficulty effectively working in inclusive settings.

Hence, it is important to note that in order to lessen the disconnect between what preservice teachers are taught and what they face as practicing teachers, Allday and colleagues (2013) state that teacher preparation programs will have to change in order to

meet the needs of preservice teachers (Buford & Casey, 2012; Melnick & Meister, 2008). Equally as important, partnerships must be formed between the schools and universities to establish dialogue about the resources needed to support teacher preparation programs as well as opportunities that can provide inclusive educational experiences (DeSimone et al., 2013; Garriott et al., 2003; Sprague & Pennell, 2000). Although current trends in special education and inclusion demonstrate the potential to make a difference in the skills and confidence of preservice and inservice teachers working with students with disabilities (Richards, 2010), it appears that there are still some gaps that exist in teacher preparation programs (Hwang & Evans, 2011; Scheeler, 2008; Winter, 2006). However, Banks and Banks (2001) reiterate that an important aim of teacher education is to help preservice and inservice teachers to acquire the knowledge, values, and behaviors needed to work effectively with students from diverse groups (p. xii).

Therefore, teacher education programs have a responsibility to both teachers and their students to ensure that educators are adequately prepared for the task of educating all students within the general education classroom (Carroll et al., 2003). However, in doing so, we must continue to examine the critical role that attitudes play in the development of novice elementary education teachers (Buford & Casey, 2012; DeSimone et al., 2013). Beginning elementary education teachers need to feel comfortable interacting with students with disabilities and embrace the philosophy of inclusion (Sharma et al., 2008). With respect given to the standards and competencies that have been implemented to measure preservice and inservice teacher quality, many skills take time to acquire and will not be demonstrated over a limited time-frame of observations.

With further review of the literature, Kosko and Wilkins (2009) express that while experience is valuable it is not the only means by which teachers improve their skills. Therefore, when planning, teacher education programs should include field experiences in inclusive settings in conjunction with special education courses (Swain et al., 2012). In a continued effort, preservice and inservice teachers should have opportunities to partake in peer mentoring, professional development, collaboration, co-teaching, and in-service training. In fact, several studies investigating novice teachers' preparation for inclusion have suggested that instructional and practical techniques be incorporated into teacher preparation programs and professional development programs to provide the additional support, training, and expertise needed for general education teachers (Aypay, 2009; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Melnick & Meister, 2008; Subban & Sharma, 2001). It is with this hope that continued examination of the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of preparedness of beginning elementary education teachers will help bridge the gap from preparation to practice in inclusive classrooms in order to make a vital contribution to the field in preparing future educators to work more effectively with students with disabilities.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

As services for students with disabilities continue to improve, general education and special education teachers are expected to provide inclusion services. According to research, teachers have mixed attitudes towards inclusion (Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014; Melnick & Meister, 2008). Furthermore, many studies have noted that the viewpoints of teachers towards inclusion are quite often influenced by their perception, belief, and attitudes (Cook, 2001; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014; Melnick & Meister, 2008; Swain et al., 2012). Therefore, indicating that teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions effect the successful execution of inclusive practices (Cipkin & Rizza, 2009; Davis & Layton, 2011; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Hastings & Oakford, 2003).

Although studies have examined general education preservice teachers' attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs towards inclusion (Kosko & Wilkins, 2009; McHatton & McCray, 2007; Shade & Stewart, 2001), few studies have investigated general education teachers in their first years of teaching and their perceptions of preparedness, acquired pedagogical skills, and the transference and implementation of inclusive practices (Scheeler, 2008). Hence, this study will use a mixed method design to collect and analyze data on beginning elementary education teachers to better understand their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes with regards to inclusion and their preparedness to

implement inclusive practices. The purpose for using this methodological approach was to allow for a more in-depth analysis of the data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007).

Data were collected by the researcher using an electronic survey. Survey research is the most appropriate method for collecting information on people's opinions, experiences, behaviors (Driscoll, 2011), attitudes, and beliefs (Creswell, 2003) when direct observation is not an option and more self-reported data is necessary. Therefore, the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire* cross-sectional survey, containing 32 items was used to assess teacher's attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs on inclusion. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert Scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*; 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Topics of interest included preparation for teaching in the inclusive setting; beliefs, perceptions, attitude towards inclusion and students with disabilities; collaboration; and opportunities for on-going training and professional development. Additional demographic data was compiled including: age, gender, years of experience, specialty area, and special education course requirements.

The rationale for this research was (a) to examine beginning general education teachers' perceptions of their preparedness for inclusion, (b) to determine the effect if any their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions have on the implementation of inclusive practices, and (c) to examine the extent of teacher preparation received related to inclusion. This study hopes to contribute to the professional literature by clarifying the link between beginning elementary general education teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions and the implementation of inclusive practices, and also establishing research on beginning teachers' ability to transfer inclusive practices and pedagogy from preparation (i.e.,

theory) to practice. Therefore, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What attitudes do beginning elementary education teachers have toward inclusion?
2. How do beginning elementary education teachers believe their teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them for inclusion?
3. What supports do beginning elementary education teachers believe are needed to effectively assist them as they transition from teacher preparation programs to classroom practice?

### **Context of the Study**

In order to study beginning elementary education teachers' preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms and their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions, this study was conducted using 2011–2014 graduates from a teacher education program at a southeastern regional university in the United States. This institution of higher education offers teacher preparation programs that prepare teacher candidates to work with students with and without disabilities in both general and special education classrooms by offering various areas of study.

### **Brief Overview of the University**

This university enrolls more than 17,000 students that come from 40 states and more than 70 countries. In addition, this institution of higher learning provides areas of study in: Arts & Sciences, Business & Economics, Health & Human Sciences, Music, Theatre & Dance, Nursing, and Education. Within the School of Education students seek

degrees in the Department of Specialized Education Services or Department of Teacher Education and Higher Education. Each major requires specific hours of course work, field experience, and learning goals as established by the department that demonstrate preparedness to work with students in the classroom.

### **Department of Special Education**

Preservice teachers participating in the special education curricula are being prepared to work with students with disabilities in a variety of educational environments. In addition, the overall goal of this department is to prepare teachers for diverse roles in working with students with disabilities in a variety of educational and community environments. As a result of this preparation, teacher candidates can receive a degree in one of the following: Elementary Education and Special Education: General Curriculum Dual Major; Professions in Deafness, or Special Education: General Curriculum. Within each of these majors, teacher candidates are exposed to the terminology, experiences, teaching strategies and skills needed to work with students with disabilities. Furthermore, these programs emphasize the delivery of services in integrated settings, with a focus on interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration. Graduates from this department are required to complete a total of 127 semester hours, which includes three early field-based experiences and a student teaching.

### **Department of Teacher Education and Higher Education**

The degrees sought within this department include: Elementary Education and Special Education: General Curriculum Dual, Elementary Education (K-6 Licensure), Middle Grades Education (6-9 Licensure). Learning goals for teacher candidates are in



line with National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC).

It is important to note that unlike dual majors in the teacher education program that are required to satisfy 127 semester hours, 38 of the major requirements are special education related (e.g., coursework, field experience). Along the same lines teacher candidates pursuing Elementary Education K-6 Licensure are required to satisfy 122 semester hours with no specific special education coursework within the related major and area requirements offered or required. Just as important, dual majors are required to participate in a total of 12 semester hours of student teaching (e.g., ten weeks in elementary setting with students identified with disabilities as well as a secondary special education setting), whereas elementary education majors are required to participate in three internships prior to student teaching with no specific focus on a field experience with working with diverse learners. Subsequently, it is at the instructors' discretion to include additional content that may be pertinent to working with diverse learners.

### **Population and Sample**

A convenience sample was taken from a group of beginning elementary education teachers who were graduates of a university located in the southeastern region of the United States. Participants for the study were selected from a population that graduated from the teacher education program and are now actively teaching in a local school system. In addition, the group of participants was in their first three years or less of teaching in the classroom in order to participate in the study. The criteria for inclusion in

the study were as follows: elementary education graduates, with three years or less of teaching experience.

### **Instrumentation**

For this study, participants were asked to complete a three part *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire* (BTIQ). The questionnaire is a self-designed instrument that was influenced by previous research conducted on both preservice and inservice teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. A pilot study was conducted prior to the study which both informed and reframed the questionnaire to its present state. In addition, to further ensure validity of the instrument faculty members from the researcher's university, who are experts in the field, provided input on the survey design. Thus, the rationale for constructing the current instrument was to specifically address areas of concern with regards to beginning teachers' perception of preparedness for inclusion and how beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions influence acquired knowledge, skills, and implementation of inclusion. Also, believed supports needed by beginning elementary teachers to effectively assist them the transition from preparation to practice will be addressed.

The BTIQ consist of items drawn from measures of attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions toward inclusion used in previous studies. One of the studies that influenced the development of the current questionnaire include Wilczenski's (1992) Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education Scale (ATIES) to measure attitudes toward including children with various disabilities in general education classes. The ATIES is a widely used instrument for measuring teacher's attitudes or views toward inclusion (Sharma et al., 2006). This instrument scores have proven to be reliable by Wilczenski (1992) with a

Cronbach's Alpha of 0.92, as well as others studying teachers' perceptions or attitudes towards inclusion (Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2006; Subban & Sharma, 2006). In addition, the Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion Scale (TATIS), developed by Cullen, Gregory, and Noto (2010), was constructed based on the premises of creating more inclusive communities that foster positive attitudes and beliefs of teachers and being more aligned with the shifts in educational policy, terminology, and pedagogy of inclusion. The TATIS was built around three well researched components of teacher attitudes toward inclusive teaching: (a) teachers' perceptions of students with disabilities, (b) beliefs about efficacy of inclusion, and (c) perception of teacher roles and functions (Cullen et al., 2010). Derived from the Attitudes of Preservice Teachers' Toward Inclusion Scale (APTAIS) (Cullen & Noto, 2007), the TATIS was confirmed reliable through Cronbach alpha correlation coefficient of 0.82, as well as strong content validity after a principal component analysis. The Attitude Toward Disabled People (ATDP) originally used by Yuker, Block, and Young (1966), has also been used to measure the attitudes toward people with disabilities since the 1970s (Tait & Purdie, 2000). Reliability of this instrument has resulted in a median stability coefficient of +.73 (Yuker et al., 1966). Validity of the instrument was established by correlating scores with measures of prejudice and other variables related to attitudes. The compilation of these instruments merits qualities that influenced the development of the BTIQ.

### **Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire**

The BTIQ consisted of three sections; demographic information, 32 Likert-type scale questions on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 =

*agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), and a set of open-ended questions that required written responses about beginning teachers' perspectives towards inclusion (see Appendix A). First, the demographic portion was structured so that participants were asked to provide responses to ethnicity, gender, age, years of experience working with disabilities, participation in field experiences, professional development, and inclusion related course work participated in. Second, participants responded to each of the 32 items on the BTIQ using a 5-point Likert-type scale. These questions solicited a certain level of agreement with regards to attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, preparation, experience, knowledge of inclusion, and support. The first twelve items (Q1–Q12) focused on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. For example, "I believe in inclusion" and "all students, disabled and non-disabled should be served in general education classes." The next 14 questions (Q13–Q26) addressed beliefs and perceptions of preparation, experiences, and knowledge of inclusion. Sample items included, "I believe that I am well prepared to implement inclusive practices with differentiated instruction" and "my teacher preparation program provided me with the training needed to collaborate with other teachers to ensure that best instruction is provided for all students." The last six Likert scale questions (Q27–Q32) focused on support. For instance, "my school supports inclusive education" and "I was provided with adequate support during field experiences in my teacher preparation program." Third, participants were asked four open-ended questions that provided teachers an opportunity to share more thorough responses with regards to their experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of inclusion. The final question of the survey allowed participants to give additional suggestions and opinions related to inclusion.

### **Follow-up Questions**

Additional open-ended questions would presumably solicit more of the participant's personal views and thought related to inclusion. In the event that insufficient data is gathered from the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire*, a follow-up email consisting of more in-depth questioning would be sent using the university email.

## **Data Collection and Procedures**

### **Data Collection**

For the current study, information was gathered by the researcher through the use of a questionnaire designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher requested contact information from the school of education for alumni who graduated from the teacher education program during the academic years of 2011-2014. Additionally, questions to be addressed on the survey were input into Qualtrics software, version (2015) and edited for administration. The questionnaire was then distributed to participants via internet by accessing an embedded link through Qualtrics online survey system. Participants were given a four and half week timeframe in which to complete the survey (i.e., January 19- February 20, 2015). Data from the BTIQ were gathered during the Spring 2015 semester. To ensure all of the open-ended questions were answered thoroughly and multiple perspectives of novice teachers were gained with regards to inclusion, additional data collection methods were considered for use (i.e., follow-up questions). A detailed description of the procedures implemented for the study, are provided below.

## Procedure

Authorization was obtained from the Institution Review Board (IRB) to conduct the study, as well as gain access to participant information through the University Alumni Relations Office. Upon IRB approval, a copy of the IRB approval notification was sent to alumni relations (see Appendices B & C). The on-line survey was inputted, edited, and released by the researcher during the third week of January to a group of 2011-2014 graduates from the teacher education program. At that time, to ensure uniformity of administration, an electronic cover letter was sent to the group of participants providing a description of the study and its purpose (see Appendix D). Following the overview, participants consenting to participate in the survey were directed to an embedded link that accessed the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire* (BTIQ). Participants were then informed that participation was voluntary and anonymous and surveys would be coded to resume anonymity. Participants willing to participate demonstrated their consent by accessing the embedded link for the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire* (BTIQ). The on-line survey took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Reminder emails were sent periodically to participants as needed, including a reminder email 2 days prior to the survey closing, as well as the last day of the survey. Also, a statement was added in the cover letter that informed participants of a drawing for a chance to win a \$100 gift card (see Appendix E). Only, participants who completed the survey in its entirety were offered the option of participating in drawing. After reviewing the collected data, the researcher found that additional information was not needed to provide more depth to the responses given. Therefore, the open-ended follow-up questions were not utilized.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the participants' demographic data. In addition, descriptive statistics for the survey items were summarized in the text and reported in tabular form. A frequency analysis was conducted to identify valid percentages for responses provided to all the questions in the survey. Data were analyzed for differences, similarities, and trends amongst beginning elementary education teachers to further our understanding of the effect of attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of beginning elementary education teachers relative to preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms.

#### **Quantitative Analysis**

The surveys were analyzed using the statistical analysis program, statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS), as well as Qualtrics statistical analysis software. There upon all Likert-type scale data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages and by calculating means and standard deviations for each of the survey items. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha, skewness and kurtosis were determined, as well as cross tabulations of demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, and position with the school district) with Likert-type scale questions to determine any noted correlations.

#### **Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative data were analyzed by coding information into themes and then categories to form conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After themes were identified, they were arranged and grouped with the corresponding questions to reflect the frequency and corroboration of responses to conclusion. Therefore, themes were established once

three or more responses reflected similar concerns, ideas, or constructs. All reported data were presented in summary tables and descriptive statistical summaries. Sources used to gather and analyze each research question can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Research Question Matrix and Data Source

Research Questions	Participants	Data Source/ Collection	Data Analysis
1. What attitudes do beginning elementary education teachers have toward inclusion?	GE and SE beginning teachers	BTIQ Q1-Q12	Qualtrics SPSS Identify merging themes and patterns
2. How do beginning elementary education teachers believe their teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them for inclusion?	GE and SE beginning teachers	BTIQ Q13-Q26	Qualtrics SPSS Identify merging themes and patterns
3. What supports do beginning elementary education teachers believe are needed to effectively assist them as they transition from teacher preparation programs to classroom practice?	GE and SE beginning teachers	BTIQ Q27-Q32	Qualtrics SPSS Identify merging themes, patterns

*Note.* GE=General Education, SE=Special Education, BTIQ=Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire

### Summary

This chapter includes an explanation of the research methodology that was used in this study. A mixed methods approach was used to describe how beginning elementary



education teachers view their preparation for inclusion and the influences of their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions on the implementation of inclusive practices.

Additionally, the questions to be addressed and rationale for the research design were identified. A description of the participants, instrumentation, procedures, pilot study, and data analysis were discussed. The results of the analysis are reported in Chapter IV.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions of preparedness for inclusion and how their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions may affect or create obstacles (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014) that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive practices during their first years in the classroom. This chapter presents the results of data collected including: (a) the data collection process and response rate, (b) a description of participant demographics, (c) data analysis and descriptive statistics, and (d) themes that emerged from the open ended questions. The data analyses were guided by the research questions posed and will be answered in this chapter along with the analysis and results.

#### **Data Collection Process and Response Rate**

This study used a three-part survey, *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire (BTIQ)*, which was created by the researcher, to provide answers to the questions. The survey, which was composed and distributed through Qualtrics, was made available to 273 elementary school teachers through their school email accounts. After the closing of the survey, data from Qualtrics was converted into a Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22 for analysis.

The initial participant pool consisted of 456 participants. However, after narrowing the list to individuals that satisfied the selection criteria, the final distribution

list consisted of 273 participants. Upon initial distribution of the surveys eight emails were returned possibly due to recipient addresses no longer existing on the mail-server. The final sample of 88 ( $N = 88$ ) beginning elementary teachers from various school districts in the state of North Carolina, comprised the participant pool used for the analysis presented below.

### **Data Analysis and Descriptive Statistics**

This section will present descriptive statistics for each survey statement and each research question. All information was transported from Qualtrics to SPSS in order for the data to be analyzed, and frequencies and percentages were calculated on the demographics of the participants thereafter.

Perceptions of preparedness related to attitudes, knowledge, barriers, and support were assessed using the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire*. The alpha internal consistency reliability for the 32 item survey for  $N=70$  alumni from a teacher preparation program at a southeastern university, “inclusion” dimension data yielded an acceptable coefficient of .844. This in turn denoted relatively high internal consistency (see Table 2). In addition, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated for each of the questions. The skewness and kurtosis values for the majority of the 32 items on the survey were within acceptable range of  $\pm 1.96$  (George & Mallery, 2001). However, two items (i.e., Q20, Q29) reflected skewed data (see Appendix F). This was taken into account in the following analysis.

Descriptive statistics for each of the survey questions can be found in Appendices G, H, and I respectively. Additionally, overall, mean scores ranged from 1.37 to 4.36. The higher the mean score the more in agreement participants were.

Table 2

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability for Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire Data

Dimension	Number of Items	Alpha Reliability
Inclusion	32	.84

### **Respondent Demographics**

The population for the study was comprised of beginning elementary education teachers who graduated from a southeastern university in the United States. The first section of the survey instrument was designed to gather personal demographic data. Participants were asked to provide responses to nine questions which included gender, age, ethnicity, position in the school district, years of experience working with students with disabilities, teacher preparation, and inclusion experience. Of the eighty-eight beginning elementary teachers who accessed the survey, the majority were female (82), while 6 were male. Seventy-one of the participants reported their ethnicity as Caucasian, 11 African American, three Multiracial, two Hispanic, and one Asian American. Likewise, the majority of the participants indicated that they were general education teachers ( $n = 83$ ), while a smaller number specified their position as special education teachers ( $n = 2$ ) and other ( $n = 3$ ). The category of other consisted of teachers of students that were English as a Second Language (ESL) and a 3-4 transition teacher. According to

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (n.d.), 3–4 transitional classrooms are specifically designed to produce learning gains sufficient to meet fourth grade performance standards while continuing to remediate areas of reading deficiency (p. 12). Participant demographics are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

## Demographic Variables for Beginning Teachers

Variable	Frequency ( <i>f</i> )	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	82	93.2
Male	6	7.0
Ethnicity		
African American	11	13.0
Asian American	1	1.0
Caucasian	71	81.0
Hispanic	2	2.0
Multiracial	3	3.0
Native American	0	0
Other	0	0
Position with the school district		
General Education Teacher	83	94
Special Education Teacher	2	2
Other	3	3

*Note.* *N* = 88

In addition, participants were asked their age and years of experience teaching. Participants' ages ranged from 22 to 50. On average participants were 24 years of age, followed by the next largest group of 25 and 26, while seventy of the 88 responses to years of experience working with students with disabilities noted three years of teaching experience or less. The relationship between teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and their age, gender, ethnicity and teaching position were investigated. Results revealed that

beginning teacher's attitudes and their age, gender, ethnicity, and teaching position were not correlated.

Data on teacher preparation programs offering special education courses and field experience participation to participants are summarized in Table 4. When participants were asked if their teacher preparation program required them to take any special education courses, 69 % of the 88 participants responded no, while 31% responded yes. An even higher percentage (92%) reported that they did take part in practicum field experiences, while a small percentage (8%) represented the individuals who did.

Table 4

Coursework and Field Experiences Preparation Demographics

Variable	Yes/No	<i>N</i>	%
Did your teacher preparation program require you to take any special education courses?	Yes	27	31%
	No	61	69%
Did your teacher preparation program require you to participate in any practicum field experiences?	Yes	81	92%
	No	7	8%

*Note.* *N* = 88

Participants were also given an opportunity to provide additional information concerning experiences working with students with disabilities outside of any practicum field experiences (i.e., sibling, friend, and daycare, etc.). As a result, the leading examples of opportunities to work with students with disabilities were noted by (36%) participants who indicated that they had taken part in no additional experiences at all,

(24%) worked or volunteered at daycares or summer camps, and (16%) had experiences with friends and family. Babysitting was the next highest (8%), closely followed by classroom (9%) and other (7%).

The last question in the demographic section of the survey asked beginning teachers if they had participated in any professional development related to inclusion. Of the 88 responses, over half of the participants ( $n = 48$ ) stated they had taken part in professional development related to inclusion, while 40 stated they had not (see Table 5).

Table 5

Teacher Participation in Professional Development

Variable	Yes/No	$n$	%
As a teacher, have you participated in any professional development related to inclusion?	Yes	48	55
	No	40	45

Note.  $N = 88$

### Quantitative Results

Of the 273 participants, 88 responded to the survey. As a result, the overall response rate was 32%, with 24% of the participants ( $n = 66$ ) having completed the entire survey. Of the 88 participants who responded to the demographic section, only 70 completed the Likert-type scale questions ( $n = 70$ ). Questions Q1–Q12 addressed the attitudes beginning elementary education teachers have toward inclusion. Hence, the frequency of individual responses of beginning elementary teachers addressing “*attitudes toward inclusion*” is shown in Appendix G. Results from the statistical analysis show that a total of 46 of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the concept of

inclusion. Similarly, 48 of the participants tended to agree or strongly agree with the declaration that they were comfortable working with students with varying abilities and disabilities. Participants were also asked to reflect their level of agreement with the statement on including only students with mild disabilities in general education classes. Forty-four participants concurred with this statement. When participants shared their level of agreement about all students being served in the general education classroom similar percentages were given. In fact, 24 participants strongly disagreed or disagreed and 29 agreed or strongly agreed, while 17 remained uncertain. Interestingly, all the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that only special education teachers should be knowledgeable about inclusion.

Furthermore, although research suggests that beginning elementary teachers perceive that they are prepared to implement inclusion, this study states otherwise. For instance, Appendix G shows a small percentage of participants ( $n = 17$ ) carry that belief, while the vast majority ( $n = 40$ ) report they are not ready to implement inclusive practices. Additionally, beginning teachers' attitudes were predominately influenced by personal experiences with individuals with disabilities 55 rather than coursework and or field experiences received in their teacher education program 34. It is also noteworthy to mention that 67 of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were willing to make the necessary modifications and adaptations in their lesson plans to accommodate all of their students. Although half of the participants ( $n = 35$ ) felt that inclusion was beneficial to all students, 23 disagreed or strongly disagreed and 12 remained undecided.



Questions Q13–Q26 address how beginning elementary education teachers believe their teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them for inclusion. Specifically, their beliefs, perceptions of preparation, experience, and knowledge of inclusion were also examined. Results revealed that while the majority of beginning teachers perceived that they were prepared to implement inclusive practices with lesson planning ( $n = 40$ ), differentiated instruction ( $n = 45$ ), and classroom management ( $n = 44$ ). Along the same lines, 37 participants did not think that they lacked the knowledge and skills needed to work with students with special educational needs. A total of 34 participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had an opportunity to observe inclusive practices being implemented during their teacher preparation program. Forty-four participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were knowledgeable of various disabilities, while 17 felt that they were not.

A large majority of participants (93%) stated that they collaborated with colleagues to provide the best instruction for all of their students. Likewise, a similar percentage believed that all students had the right to the same curriculum (80%) and that all teachers and administrators should be involved in the inclusion process (86%). Subsequently, participants were asked about their teacher education program relative to providing training needed to effectively collaborate, differentiate instruction, and work with students with disabilities. Forty-three participants (61%) agreed or strongly agreed they were provided the training needed to collaborate with other teachers in their teacher education program, while (26%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Sixty-seven percent agreed or strongly agreed that they received training to differentiate instructions for

diverse learners, as well as the opportunity to work with students with disabilities (32%) (see Appendix H).

The last portion of the beginning teacher inclusion questionnaire (BTIQ) asked questions related to support. For this reason, questions Q27–Q32 addressed the supports beginning elementary education teachers believe are needed to effectively assist them as they transition from teacher preparation programs to classroom practice. The frequency of responses of the survey items related to support received from preparation to practice can be seen in Appendix I. Teachers responses indicated that they agreed ( $n = 37$ ) or strongly agreed ( $n = 14$ ) that they were provided adequate support during field experiences in their teacher education program. Support referring to feedback, guidance, and resources needed during the field experience. Similar results were noted with support provided to the same teachers now practicing, as 32 agreed and 3 strongly agreed to this statement. Fifty-eight participants agreed or strongly agreed that their school supported inclusion, while 53 have had opportunities to collaborate with colleagues about strategies and instructional practices that are effective in inclusion.

When presented with the statement my school district offers opportunities for in-service training and professional development related to inclusion a total of 15 of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed. While 24 were uncertain if such opportunities even existed. Likewise it is important to mention that although 31 participants expressed that their school district offered in-service and or some type of professional development; a total of 37 participants disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement that they participated in on going professional development related to working

with students' with disabilities (see Table 6). Notably Shady et al. (2013) found in their study with teachers that "responses acknowledged that professional development was essential if inclusive practices were to improve" (p. 187). Idol (2006) found similar results in that teachers indicated the need for professional development to ensure consistency in the curriculum offered, making appropriate instructional and curricular modifications, and knowledge of how to work more effectively and best use time and resources.

Table 6

## In-service, Training, and Professional Development Relative to Inclusion

	Number (%)						Mean
	Strongly Disagree/Disagree		Uncertain		Agree/Strongly Agree		
Q31 My school district offers opportunities for in-service training and professional development related to inclusion	15	(21.0)	24	(34.0)	31	(44.0)	3.27
Q 32 I participate in ongoing professional development related to working with students with disabilities	37	(53.0)	13	(19.0)	20	(29.0)	2.73

Note. N = 70

### **Qualitative Results**

To further investigate beginning elementary education teachers' preparation for teaching in inclusive classrooms with regards to their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions; the last section of the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire* (BTIQ) consisted of providing a written response to four open-ended questions to elicit richer, more detailed descriptions of participants' perceptions of their preparation for inclusion. For example, "how do you feel about including students with disabilities in your classroom," "do you believe that your teacher preparation program adequately prepared you to work with students with disabilities," "as a beginning teacher, what do you perceive is a barrier to successful implementation of inclusion," and "does your school offer opportunities to participate in professional development related to working with students with disabilities." The analysis of the raw data generated from these questions enabled the researcher to analyze respondent's descriptions of their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences to develop common themes and patterns. The results of the open-ended questions have been synthesized into categories and thus the following themes emerged: attitudes about inclusion, perceptions of preparedness, barriers to inclusion, and supports needed for beginning teachers to effectively transition preparation to practice. Sixty-five responses were given for the themes related to attitudes, preparedness, and barriers. However, because all of the participants did not answer all of the questions, 64 responses were provided related to the topic of support (see Table 7).

Table 7

## Themes and Categories from Qualitative Data Analysis

Theme	Categories	<i>n</i>
Attitude toward students with disabilities	Student behavior Benefit to other students Degree of disability Differentiating and planning Knowledge and Training	65
Perceptions of Preparedness		65
Prepared	Personal experience, teaching experience, and teaching experience	
Did not prepare	No field experiences, lack of courses, and no knowledge of disabilities	
Barriers to Inclusion	Lack of knowledge Classroom assistants Support Motivation Resources	65
Supports Beginning Teachers Need	Professional development Resources Administration Teacher preparation Classroom assistants	64

*Note.* *n* = total number of responses for each theme

These themes, in conjunction with the analysis from the quantitative section of the survey were reviewed to give larger meaning to the findings of the entire study (Creswell, 2005). Therefore, raw data was analyzed from the open-ended questions using several steps (Hahn, 2007). Coding was done in which the researcher: (a) read through all of the data several times and identified links to the research questions and there by established codes, (b) re-read and developed categories from codes, (c) looked for patterns and

explanations in the codes, (d) sought out specific data that illustrated and explained the analysis, and (e) organized data into common themes. The categories provided organization of the participants' responses and addressed each question accordingly.

Open-ended question 1 asked, "*How do you feel about including students with disabilities in your classroom?*" Results of the analysis conducted for question one can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8

Including Students with Disabilities in Your Classroom

Variables	<i>n</i>
Agree with the practice of inclusion, enjoy working with EC students	15
Depends on the degree of the disability	14
Agree if given the right support	11
Question the best way to differentiate and plan	8
It should be a case by case decision	4
Professional development and training	4
Concerns with behaviors	2
Great if disability allows students to get the most out of social and educational aspect	3
Unfair at times to other students	2
Students would not benefit	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>

Note. *N* = 65 Total # of participants, *n* = number of responses for each statement

Sixty-five of the 88 total participants provided responses to this question. While most participants expressed an agreement with inclusion, there were feelings of concern

in the areas of student behavior, benefit to other students, degree of disability, and how to differentiate and plan. In terms of including students with disabilities in their classrooms 15 agreed with the practice of inclusion and enjoyed working with students with disabilities. However, 14 of the responses stated that it depended on the disability. Additionally, those teachers felt that students with mild to moderate disabilities would be able to function successfully in a regular education classroom. Participant #01 stated,

Depending on the degree of disability, my feelings vary. Children with mild disabilities make me feel comfortable in my ability to meet their needs. Children who have severe learning disabilities make me feel nervous and almost cautious.

Results of the survey found 11 of the participants agreed with inclusion if provided with the right support in the form of resources, time, and assistance. Eight of the participants expressed they agreed with inclusion, however, they were not confident in how to differentiate for diverse learners. In addition, participants voiced they did not have the time to do so effectively. Participant #19 stated, “I think that it is right for most of them to be in my class for at least part of the day when they have disabilities, but I don’t always think I know the best way to differentiate for their learning. Nor am I provided with enough planning time to do this adequately.” In harmony with inclusion being great, three participants felt that the students should get the most out of the social and educational aspect for inclusion to be beneficial. Four participants stated that it should be a case by case decision. Similar numbers were shown with providing more professional development and training ( $n = 4$ ). Two participants acknowledged that while inclusion was a great practice, they still had concerns in each of the areas of student

behaviors, unfairness to other students in the class, and that not all students would benefit.

“While it is the right thing to do for those with disabilities, it can be unfair to high performers who often are left to their own devices while a teacher gives extra support to those with disabilities” (Participant #05). Likewise, Participant #82 said, “I love working with them because they are all so sweet and such hard workers, but I feel I often neglect the other 18 students in my class so I can serve them.”

Melnick and Meister (2008) state that student behaviors cause concern for novice teachers. To demonstrate this concern Participant #37 stated,

I feel that all students have the right to an education within a regular education classroom, however if the disability is so that it disrupts other students consistently throughout the day, then an inclusion classroom may be necessary.

A similar response was noted by Participant #20:

I feel that inclusion is a great practice, but when students with disabilities cause a distraction and a detriment to student success in the classroom, some separation should be made. The same idea should be applied when students without disabilities are disruptive, but only if the disruptions are so great that they negatively impact the capability for other students to learn.

According to Allday et al. (2013), “managing disruptive and challenging behaviors is one of the most stressful aspects of teaching” (p. 307). Therefore, it is important to keep this viewpoint in mind when preparing teachers to work with students with disabilities.

Question 2 of the open-ended inquiries asked, “*What do you think most prepared you or not prepared you during your teacher preparation to work with students with*



*disabilities?”* Of the 65 responses, 34 participants stated they were really not prepared to work with students with disabilities. However, of the 31 participants who expressed they were comfortable working with students with disabilities, the following reasons were given: personal experiences, student teaching, and teaching experiences. Participants #56, #59, and #73 all stated, “student teaching and hands on experiences helped me the most.” Participant #78 said, “We had to make presentations one day, and my group decided to blindfold each other and students shared their experiences. It was a very transformative activity.” Eight individuals stated that observations, teaching experience, and collaboration assisted with preparing them to work with students with disabilities. Participant #36 stated, “observation of others” help in preparing to work with students with disabilities. Relative to teaching experience Participant #37 stated, “I was given a class as a first year teacher with five students with disabilities.” That prepared me the most, learning through firsthand experience.” Responses to collaboration reflected “working with the resource teachers will greatly help” (Participant #23) and “cooperation with EC teachers is key”! (Participant #26).

Along the same lines, five participants shared that personal experiences such as babysitting, volunteering while in high school, and working as a preschool teacher helped to prepare them for inclusion. A relatively small group of participants ( $n = 3$ ) stated that seminars that discussed students with disabilities was what benefitted them the most from their teacher preparation. For example Participant #19 conveyed, “I think that seminars with other students where students with disabilities were discussed, was the thing that most benefitted me as part of the teacher preparation program.”

Those components expressed as not preparing teachers for inclusion were all linked back to teacher preparation. Of the participants, 15 indicated that no specific field experiences or opportunities to work with students with disabilities were offered to teachers during their teacher preparation. Numbers were similar in the participants' feelings relative to not being prepared to work with students with disabilities as a result of the lack of courses offered related to inclusion ( $n = 12$ ). For instance Participant #2 stated "all I did was learn about various disabilities, not how to include them." In like manner, "I had no classes on special education and I don't think that prepared me for teaching. I struggle with differentiation because of this" (Participant # 15). Other areas that participants stated effected their preparation were lack of adequate instruction and observation ( $n = 5$ ) and lack of knowledge of a variety of disabilities ( $n = 2$ ).

Participant #43 stated,

While I have learned a lot through trial and error in teaching students with disabilities and work with a very special group of EC teachers who help tremendously, I was not prepared at all. This is hard to prepare for since you do not know which type of disability you will have in your classroom but I do believe there is a lot that can be taught with help from special education instructors.

Similarly, Participant #44 stated,

I wasn't prepared. I love the University of \_\_\_\_\_ and the education I got while studying there but you all need to branch out from the good, safe schools and send those future teachers to the kind of schools that are hiring. The good schools don't need the good teachers you produce; the struggling schools do. I've been at my struggling school 3 years now and can count on one hand the teachers who have been there since I started. Struggling school = High turnover rate = Student failure.

What participants felt most prepared or did not prepare them during their teacher preparation to work with students with disabilities was captured in Table 9.

Table 9

Prepared or Not Prepared to Work with Students with Disabilities

Prepared	<i>n</i>
Student teaching with students with disabilities	15
Teaching Experience/Collaboration/Observation	8
Personal Experiences	5
Seminars	3
Not Prepared	
Lack of field experiences or opportunities to work with students with disabilities	15
Lack and type of courses offered	12
Lack of adequate instruction, only observed	5
Lack of knowledge about a variety of disabilities	2

*Note.* *N* = 65

The third question in the open-ended section asked, “*What do you perceive as a barrier to successful implementation of inclusion?*” When participants were asked what they perceived were barriers to successful implementation of inclusion several answers were given. Still, common themes such as lack of knowledge and preparedness, lack of classroom assistants and support, motivation and resources, and student behaviors and assessments were the prominent themes that emerged (see Table 10).

Findings reflected that 17 participants felt that lack of knowledge and preparedness and 16 participants indicated that lack of instructional support were the top

two barriers impeding successful implementation of inclusion. Participant #77 voiced that “I did not know a lot about what goes on legally to get these students services or what is legally required by teachers.” Similar comments about knowledge and preparedness stated,

My first year of teaching was quite difficult with three EC students and no real understanding of what to do for them. Being able to work with these types of students before- hand and having classes on disabilities and working with students with disabilities, would be very helpful. (Participant #35)

Because of my lack of knowledge when I was a first year teacher, I often felt that it was unfair or too difficult for me to teach in an inclusion classroom. Through my experiences in working with EC students and supportive EC staff, I have completely changed my opinion of inclusion classrooms. I believe difficult first years such as mine could be avoided with better preparation from teacher education programs. (Participant #29)

The next highest three perceived barriers reflected the following areas; lack of planning time ( $n = 8$ ), lack of resources ( $n = 6$ ) and other ( $n = 7$ ). As a result some of the responses that support these areas included “having enough resources, time and support in the classroom” (Participant # 13), “Teacher planning time. It takes time to make lessons and materials that work for all students” (Participant #14), and Participant #43 stated,

Time is one barrier. When I have students in my classroom who range four different grade levels, it is very difficult to come up with lesson plans that meet the needs of all of them. I do not have the time to make specialized plans, run copies, and implement everything in my classroom.

The category of “other” was composed of common core, classroom size, zoning, constant assessments, improper training, and the expectation that all students with

disabilities should participate in inclusion. As an overall summation of barriers it is noteworthy to mention that Participant #7 shared,

Constant assessment, even in lower elementary, and teacher accountability tied to pay contracts force teachers to focus on the students in the middle that they know they can grow. During the year this takes the focus off of students with disabilities. Time and resources are also huge barriers as the number of standards we are required to cover in a year is so vast that there isn't a lot of time to thoroughly cover each standard. Students don't have enough time to grasp concepts. We assess more than we teach starting in the lower grades! Students with disabilities get left behind.

Three of the participants each stated that lack of assistants, behaviors of students with disabilities, and the lack of communication between staff as barriers. Only two persons noted lack of motivation as a barrier to successful implementation of inclusion (see Table 10).

Table 10

Perceived Barriers to Successful Implementation of Inclusion

<b>Barrier</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Lack of knowledge and preparedness	17	26
Lack of instructional support	16	25
Lack of planning time	8	12
Lack of resources	6	9
Other (i.e., zoning, common core, classroom size, assessment, expectation that all SWD should participate, improper training)	7	10
Lack of assistants	3	5
Behaviors of students with disabilities	3	5

Table 10

(Cont.)

Barrier	<i>n</i>	%
Lack of communication between staff	3	5
Lack of motivation	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: *n* = Number of participants, *N* = Total of responses

Question 4 asked, “*What do you think is needed to better support teachers with implementing inclusive practices as they transition from preparation to practice into the general education classroom?*” In order to be an effective teacher in inclusion, one must have the necessary support. Based on the results of the survey, those supports can be found in professional development, resources, administration, teacher preparation, and classroom assistance. The frequencies and percentages of participants for each area of support are reflected in Table 11.

Findings from the top five categories of support were somewhat similar. Eleven of the participants stated that support was needed in the area of more classes and education needed on inclusion. Participant #15 stated, “I think a class should be provided to allow teachers the opportunity to learn about students with disabilities.” While Participant #43 relayed similar feelings: “I believe that if inclusion is going to continue in public schools, all education students need to have instruction and hands-on experience with a student that has more than a mild disability.” Respectively ten individuals stated that they would have liked support through professional development. Participants #37, #42, and #22 noted, “more professional development and training as a student teacher,

while #32 said, “I think there should be professional development classes on inclusion and classes to observe how it should work.” Also, nine individuals expressed the need for an assistant in the classroom to provide hands on assistance and help with transitioning.

Table 11

Support Needed for Teachers from Preparation to Practice

Area of Support	<i>n</i>	%
Provide more classes and education on Inclusion	11	17
Provide more professional development	10	16
Provide help in the form of an assistant	9	14
Provide a support team	8	13
Provide more student teacher opportunities (i.e., sit in IEP meetings, plan with special education teachers, exposure to Title I schools)	8	13
Provide field experiences in inclusive classes	6	9
Other (i.e., provide mentor, simulated activities, Flexibility in curriculum, resources, time)	5	8
Provide more resources	3	5
Opportunities to observe, feedback, and discuss	2	3
Support from administration	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note.* *N* = 64

Eight participants stated that providing a support team to answer questions along the way, as well as providing resources would be a beneficial support. In addition, Participant #18 shared, “allowing student teachers to sit in on IEP meetings (with parental

permission), following the paperwork and process, and working with students with disabilities to see how different strategies are helpful and received by students.” Thus, indicating that support was needed in providing student teacher opportunities in areas such as planning with special education teachers, sitting in IEP meetings, and exposure to Title I schools ( $n = 8$ ).

Additional areas of support were indicated in field experiences in inclusive classes ( $n = 6$ ). The next greatest area of need of support was other which covered providing a mentor, simulated activities, flexibility in curriculum, resources, and time ( $n = 5$ ). The lesser needs of support for teachers from preparation to practice are in the areas of resources ( $n = 3$ ), opportunities to observe ( $n = 2$ ), and support from administration ( $n = 1$ ). Participant #06 commented,

Inclusion practices are difficult, but administration needs to have the backs of all the teachers, whether general or special education teachers. I have noticed, in my professional experiences that many administrators are against inclusion practices because it brings their test scores down. I have learned that when you stop focusing on test scores, and start focusing on the individual potential of a student, and all staff members are working towards one common goal to tap into each students potential; then the students perform better as a whole whether they are labeled general or special education students.

### **Summary**

Overall, the quantitative data suggested that all of the participants had some level of disagreement with the statement that only special education teachers should be knowledgeable about inclusion. Therefore, indicating that both general and special education teachers should be knowledgeable about inclusion. Although participants noted that most of their schools supported inclusion, additional support was still needed



in the form of hands on assistance, resources, time, and professional development. Especially since many of the beginning teachers stated they did not participate in professional development and or in-service training related to working with students with disabilities. Also, participants noted that having encouragement and support from administrators was imperative to successful inclusion.

On the contrary, qualitative data suggested that participants expressed that although they believed in inclusion, there were still concerns about students' degree of disability, student behaviors, the right support given, and the proper training. In particular, many participants reported their preparation programs did not adequately prepare them to work with students with disabilities and most of their inclusion experiences were a result of personal and teaching experiences. Likewise, lack of training and courses related to working with students with disabilities were noted as barriers to successfully implementing inclusion.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

Several researchers have found that inclusion carries with it a stigma of negativity and exclusion (De Boer et al., 2011; Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). This study showed that the typical respondent to this survey was female (93%) and a general education teacher (94%). Participant ages ranged from 22 to 50, with the average age being 24. Most of the beginning teachers (69%) were not required to take any type of special education courses during their teacher preparation. However, 92% of those same teachers were required to participate in practicum field experiences.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to report demographic data. Qualitative data were reported by frequencies and percentages of central tendencies for the instrument's open-ended questions. The study aimed to address and answer the following three questions:

1. What attitudes do beginning elementary education teachers have toward inclusion?
2. How do beginning elementary education teachers believe their teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them for inclusion?
3. What supports do beginning elementary education teachers believe are needed to effectively assist them as they transition from teacher preparation programs to classroom practice?

A mixed-method approach was used to collect data for this study. For this reason, a survey instrument was created to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as demographics. As a result, the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire* was constructed by the researcher and divided into three sections.

### **Summary of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1**

*What attitudes do beginning elementary education teachers have toward inclusion?* Research by Burke and Sutherland (2004) identified attitude as an influential factor in inclusion programs, as it affects teachers' behavior towards students. Interestingly, although most of the participants ( $n = 46$ ) in this study agreed or strongly agreed in inclusion; they simultaneously highlighted areas of concern in its implementation. This view is supported by David and Kuyini (2012) who found that while teachers may agree on inclusion theoretically, they have negative attitudes as far as its implementation. The highest area of concern was the students' degree of disability. Participants were more comfortable working with students with a mild to moderate disability, such as ADHD. However, they were less comfortable with students with behaviors and varying disabilities such as severe learning disabilities, visual and hearing impairments and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). As a result, some participants noted that inclusion would be unfair to other students in the general education classroom. Similarly, Garriott et al. (2003) and McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, and Loveland (2001) noted these same concerns in a study with beginning teachers. Although participants expressed concerns, they felt that inclusion could work if additional support

was provided in the form of classroom assistance, additional resources, and time to plan. Participants also expressed the need for proper training and additional professional development.

On the other hand a small percentage ( $n = 10$ , 14%) acknowledged on the Likert scale that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with inclusion. While fourteen participants out of 70 (20%) were uncertain. This percentage did not correlate with the open-ended question response, as only ( $n = 2$ , 3%) stated inclusion would not be beneficial to students with disabilities.

## **Research Question 2**

*How do beginning elementary education teachers believe their teacher preparation program has adequately prepared them for inclusion?* Similar to the findings of Hunter-Johnson et al. (2014) the results of this study also revealed that teachers were not as prepared for inclusion as they perceived but that they had little or no experience in working with students with disabilities upon entering the classroom. These findings support previous research related to teacher preparation to work with students with disabilities (Beacham & Rouse, 2012; Melnick & Meister, 2008) in that many teachers feel unprepared to deal with diverse learners their first years in the classroom. Likewise, Harvey and colleagues (2010) also found that many teachers have little or no experience working with students with disabilities.

Qualitative results of the survey showed that while beginning elementary education teachers felt that field experiences were a very important part of being prepared to work with students with disabilities; quantitative data revealed that only a minority

( $n = 15$ ) stated they were afforded the opportunity to experience such. Similarly, quantitative results showed that 26 participants agreed or strongly agreed that their teacher preparation program provided an opportunity to work with students with disabilities. Interestingly, “the lack of experience” working with students with disabilities during teacher preparation was continuously emphasized. For this reason, most participants stated their inclusion experience came from on the job training or personal experiences. In addition, participants indicated that observations, collaboration, and seminars assisted with being prepared to work in inclusive settings. Collaboration between special and general education teachers was found to be an important factor that impacts the success of inclusion. Therefore, teachers need the time to work together to develop appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. As a result, there was little variance between qualitative and quantitative results ( $n = 93\%$ ) concerning collaboration (see Appendix F).

In essence, teachers’ responses indicated a need for more field experiences, more courses on inclusion, and exposure to various disabilities to better prepare them to work with diverse learners. Even more so, is the proven effectiveness of pairing coursework with these field experiences (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). As such, teachers expressed a need for not just field experiences with observations, but events that include opportunities for collaboration, discussion, and active participation in inclusive essentials such as IEP meetings, planning, and the preparation of paperwork. Interestingly, when teachers expressed their unpreparedness they did not communicate a need for training related to co-teaching or how it should be implemented. Notably,

Friend (2008) states that co-teaching is a highly collaborative means of delivering special educational services. Therefore, it is beneficial for teachers to acquire both knowledge and skills about co-teaching at preservice and in-service levels to foster the necessary partnership between general and special educators to effectively implement inclusive practices (Shady et al., 2013).

### **Research Question 3**

*What supports do beginning elementary education teachers believe are needed to effectively assist them as they transition from teacher preparation programs to classroom practice?* Fifty-one percent of the participants who completed the *Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire* (BTIQ) agreed or strongly agreed that they were provided with the support needed to work with students with disabilities. However, responses to open ended questions reflected that beginning elementary teachers needed support in the area of assistants (14%) and more education and courses on inclusion (17%). The variance in qualitative and quantitative responses may be based on the different forms of support noted being that it is not specifically known what type of support was available at the participants' place of work. As a result, this could have minimized the skewness of support (see Appendix F).

Similar to the findings of Youngs et al. (2011) participants expressed the need for administrative support, which in turn not only would make available the resources, time, and flexibility needed in the curriculum to implement inclusive practices, but also impacts teachers' attitudes by reaffirming a positive learning environment (Kern, 2006). It is also important to point out that participants voiced the need for support in the form

of an available and knowledgeable mentor in the classroom to answer questions and provide feedback to them during teacher preparation, as well as their transition into practicing teachers. These views were also shared by Swain and colleagues (2012) as mentoring is regarded as a substantial part of inclusion success.

In addition to needs of support, teachers shared what they felt were barriers to successful implantation of inclusion. Based on results of the current study, the top two barriers as seen by beginning teachers were lack of knowledge and preparedness and the absence of instructional support. This finding concurred with Ali, Mustapha, and Jelas (2006), who stated in their study that teachers were frustrated because they lacked the means and knowledge of instructional methods for educating students with disabilities. Although a few participants reported receiving instruction on inclusion and how to differentiate for diverse learners; the majority expressed the absence of required courses and coursework related to students with disabilities. In addition, little to no instruction on disabilities, strategies, and differentiation was received. These findings are in harmony with Biddle (2006) and Kosko and Wilkins (2009) research that indicates that some general education teachers were never offered or do not take courses on teaching students with disabilities. Other variables that were seen as impeding successful implementation of inclusion were a shortage of resources, planning time, and scarcity of assistants. These barriers were found to be commonly noted relative toward inclusive practices (McCray & McHatton, 2011; Melnick & Meister, 2008; Richards & Clough, 2004).

In summary, findings revealed that overall beginning teachers have positive attitudes towards the concept of inclusion. However, they still hold some concerns,

especially with the degree of the disability the student possess, need for more classroom support, students behaviors, and not knowing how to differentiate and plan. Participants also expressed that their greatest source of preparation for inclusion actually stemmed from hands on teaching and personal experiences working with students with disabilities. Beginning teachers also felt that because of their lack of knowledge, preparedness, and instructional support they were neither confident nor competent to work effectively with students with disabilities. As a result, beginning teachers expressed the need to partake in better teacher preparation, on-going professional development, and in-service training to obtain more in-depth knowledge and training related to working in an inclusive setting. Not only do these elements of support provide the assistance that beginning teachers need in order to transition more successfully from preparation to practice, but they also create an opportunity for teachers to acquire the knowledge and skill standards set by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2009). In doing so, teachers must also be assessed on what they have learned and if they can apply what they have learned (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

As teachers take part in more general and special education collaboratively structured teacher preparation programs, presumably they will learn to blend deconstructed prior knowledge with current knowledge to sustain both course content and experiences relative to students with disabilities. By doing so, the implementation of inclusive practices may prove to be more efficient and effective. Hence, this study reveals that some gaps still remain between acquiring effective pedagogical skills about working with students with disabilities and transferring those skills to the classroom.



Thus, the need still exists for continuous training such as professional development and in-service training to sustain and implement newly acquired skills and knowledge (McLeskey & Waldron, 2004).

### **Limitations**

A significant limitation of this study lies in the response rate. Even though statistics state that online surveys usually yield a 24.8 % average response rate (Penwarden, 2014), a larger response rate would capture a truer picture of perceived preparedness of beginning teachers in inclusion. Although the survey was distributed via email to 273 alumni teachers who graduated from a teacher education program at a southeastern university between the years of 2011-2014, it was anticipated that approximately (50%) of the participants would have completed the survey. However, it was taken into consideration that teachers may have not responded due to the demands of the teacher workday and an unfamiliar sender. In addition, emails that did not reach participants may have been a result of data not updated for the last place of employment for alumni. Along the same lines, the number of participant responses decreased for the qualitative portion of the survey from ( $N = 88$ ) to an average of 65 responses. As a result, this may have affected the results of the qualitative analysis.

Another limitation was that of a limited participant pool. Employing participants from other institutions of higher education (IHE) perhaps would have provided more varied and significant results, as well as a wider-range of demographics to support the study. One university doesn't portray an accurate reflection of what may be offered at other universities in their teacher education program (i.e., coursework, field experiences,

and support). For that reason, the study reflected limited external validity of the effectiveness of teacher education programs offered (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Also, the time span in which the survey was accessible to participants was limited to 3-4 weeks. The researcher feels as if the survey had been left on line for a longer time span it is presumed that additional beginning teachers would have contributed to the data and possibly more completed surveys would have been submitted.

A limitation that is not to be overlooked is that of participant response bias. As a result, participants may have provided socially desirable responses, rather than their most honest response. However, the researcher attempted to avoid response bias through the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

### **Recommendations**

With inclusion more widely accepted and implemented in schools, it is essential that an overall collaborative effort occur in teacher education programming sooner rather than later. Opportunities should be provided to discuss and focus on elements that impact teacher attitudes towards inclusion such as support, ongoing training to work with students with disabilities, and accommodative teaching methods that can be used to meet the needs of all students. Therefore, recommendations are made based on the results of the study to assist with the move toward inclusive practice and improving the preparation of teachers. Teacher education programs should (a) increase preservice opportunities for teaching students with disabilities, (b) restructure coursework addressing inclusive practices, (c) provide support for preservice and induction teachers, and (d) enhance professional development on inclusive practice.

**Preservice Opportunities for Teaching Students with Disabilities**

Based on the findings of this study, beginning elementary education teachers would like to have more opportunities to work with students with disabilities during their preparation. For that reason, it is suggested that teacher educator programs offer general education preservice teachers the opportunity to participate in more authentic field experiences that correlate with special education coursework, while continuing to connect assignments and projects to standards and competencies (Cooper et al., 2008). Moreover, experiences should be applicable and include working in diverse settings with varied context and diverse disabilities. Examples of such experiences would include opportunities to observe and practice collaboration (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006), rehearse and reflect on classroom management, design and execute differentiated instruction, and participate in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings with other staff (i.e., service providers, resource teachers, special education teachers, and parents). For this reason it is important to consider the quality of the field placement in which the student teacher is placed (McHatton & Parker, 2013) taking into consideration that preservice teachers need to see inclusive evidence based practices being implemented. Along the same lines, remembering that attitudes play a vital part in the successful implementation of inclusion (Subban & Sharma, 2005), it is imperative that programs be restructured to include more experiences to assist with reshaping teacher attitudes and beliefs to foster more positive interactions with students with disabilities.

**Coursework Addressing Inclusive Practice**

Regardless of educational major and or instructional level, all general education preservice teachers should be exposed to coursework on the subject of inclusion. As a result of the needs voiced by the participants of this study, as well as other related studies (Hwang & Evans, 2011; McCray & McHatton, 2011) teacher education programs should be well rounded to incorporate courses that provide knowledge of both disabilities and how to differentiate for diverse learners (Washburn-Moses, 2008). Participants that did partake in coursework related to inclusion, continued to feel unprepared as a result of just receiving an introductory class on disabilities. Thus, the need to reconsider stand-alone programs and infuse more special education content across disciplines to increase the understanding of special education (McCray & McHatton, 2011, p. 150) and strategies used with diverse learners. Therefore, both coursework and field experiences across disciplines should display collaborative partnerships that allow teachers to prepare, teach, and reflect on inclusive practices and experiences, as well as make a connection across curricula (Adams et al, 2005). According to Adams et al. (2005), when teachers reflect on practice it supports both their learning and progress. In addition, a collaborative effort should be put forth to cultivate the infusion of inclusive practices and pedagogy across disciplines throughout universities, departments of instruction, schools, and communities to foster a harmonious effort toward inclusion.

**Support**

Teachers should be provided support throughout their teacher preparation program. In fact, participants expressed the need for support in the guise of immediate

feedback from field experiences, as well as opportunities to discuss and address areas of concern. Providing support during preservice years assist with building teacher confidence (Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012) that is needed to work with diverse students, as well as competence. It is also important that teacher educators take into account the developmental stages encountered while preparing to become a teacher. Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2006) state that most teachers do not present mastery until their fourth year of teaching. It is for this reason support is warranted at the preservice and inservice level, as well as the first three years of teaching. Even more important, teacher educators must follow-up with teachers after their first year of teaching (Borko, et al., 2006) and thereafter to see what is needed to further assist them in sustaining confidence, knowledge, and skills necessary to effectively work with students with disabilities, while providing additional guidance and support. Follow-up with beginning teachers can be done in the form of a needs and assessment survey and or small focus groups that allow beginning teachers to discuss problems encountered within the first years of teaching, especially as it relates to working with diverse learners. Thereafter, information should be analyzed, compiled, and used to enhance future teacher preparation programs, as well as address any immediate concerns teachers may have.

Support should also be provided in the form of continued mentorship once teachers transition into the classroom. Therefore, mentors should have the experience, knowledge, and expertise to address the concerns of their mentees (Algozzine, Gretes, Queen, & Cowan-Hathcock, 2007). With this in mind, a collaborative partnership between faculty from institutions of higher education (IHE) and the school district should

provide support. For this reason, additional time should be allotted for face to face meetings, both planned and spontaneous for observations and feedback (Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, & Otis-Wilburn, 2008). Hence, administrators should be aware of the vital role they play in a beginning teacher's first year in the classroom. Not only is it important for administrators to provide mentors with the flexibility, time, and resources needed to effectively assist novice teachers. It is just as important that administrators convey an attitude of acceptance and comfortableness with inclusion to foster an overall positive attitude toward inclusion.

### **Professional Development on Inclusive Practice**

Beginning elementary education teachers would also like to receive more in-service training and or opportunities for professional development that demonstrate and educate how to work with students with disabilities (i.e., differentiated instruction and strategies, types of disabilities, collaboration, roles and responsibilities). Ongoing training would not only increase beginning teachers' understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014), but also ensure a unified understanding of inclusion while influencing their attitudes and confidence levels in a positive manner (Avramidis et al., 2000b). Therefore, training should incorporate current strategies, knowledge and evidence practices used with students with disabilities.

Since all stakeholders play a vital part in the successful implementation of inclusion, current inclusive practices must span throughout preservice to inservice. In order for this to occur, teacher education programs must partner with school districts to discuss, organize, and cultivate a uniformed approach that aims to provide continuous

support for beginning teachers in the areas of (a) characteristics of students with disabilities, (b) planning and differentiating instruction for diverse learners, (c) inclusive classroom management, (d) inclusion and collaborative partnerships, and (e) special education policies and procedures. Not only is it important to create a bridge between teacher education and professional development to ensure sustainability and generalization (Scheeler, 2008) of pedagogy for beginning teachers to work with students with disabilities in general education classrooms. It is just as important for professional development sessions to always follow up with assessments (i.e., online, face to face) to evaluate continuous needs of novice teachers, as well as provide appropriate ongoing training (Melnick & Meister, 2008). With hopes that the department of instruction (DPI) review the feedback at least twice a year (i.e., Fall, Spring) to make the necessary adjustments in professional development to continually inform inclusive practices and make it relevant to 21st century learning for all students.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Given the fact that inclusion is becoming more prevalent, there is a need for a better understanding of what is required to ensure beginning elementary education teachers are equipped to work with such a diverse group of learners. Both the concepts of structure and requirements of teacher education programs should be investigated in order to determine specific elements of each construct that impact beginning teachers' preparation and being able to work with diverse learners. Hence, the current research revealed that coursework and field experience during teacher preparation, ongoing professional development, and the need for additional classroom support have a positive

impact on beginning teacher's attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions as it relates to their preparation for working in inclusive classrooms. Therefore, it is recommended that future research is needed to further investigate these three areas.

The initial course in which preservice teachers are trained seems to play a critical role in how inclusive education strategies are employed (Nes, 2000). As a result, research has been mixed about the effectiveness of specific courses relative to students with disabilities (Hsien, 2007; Kosko & Wilkins, 2009). Hence, future studies should examine not only course descriptions, but content as well. Along the same lines, these studies should examine the integration of more authentic field experiences with courses to ensure more in-depth coverage of inclusion.

Beginning teachers have clearly stated within the qualitative analysis the need for more professional development as it relates to working with students with disabilities. Therefore, further study is warranted to identify the types of professional development offered to teachers relative to working with students with disabilities and the impact of modeling effective practices on actual implementation. Idol (2006) found that practicing teachers mentioned the need for more professional development in the areas of basic knowledge of students with disabilities, differentiating instruction, and effective classroom management.

Based on the results of this study, it is clear that support plays a huge role in both teachers' attitudes, as well as performance. Therefore, further research should be done on the type and frequency of classroom support that beginning elementary education teachers receive related to working with students with disabilities, and the effects on



implementation of inclusive practices using a longitudinal comparison case study on two teachers who receive support. Moreover, observations and interviews should be conducted with those participants to capture true overall synopses of what beginning general education teachers experience when working with students with disabilities, and what is really necessary to become a successful inclusion teacher.

### **Conclusion**

As more students with disabilities join the general education classroom, teachers in these settings will be faced with many new challenges. These challenges include but are not limited to addressing a wide range of academic needs, behavior issues, and lack of resources, time, and knowledge. In fact, Johnson and Fullwood (2006) state that general education teachers will be required to invest more time to plan for modifications and secure resources to teach students with disabilities. In addition, general education teachers may spend 90% more time instructing SWD than general education students. As shown in this study, students with disabilities are often placed in classrooms with teachers who lack the training and knowledge needed to meet their educational needs. As a result, teachers become frustrated and less confident in their strategies and interactions with diverse learners.

In summary, the findings of this research suggest that a significant portion of beginning elementary education teachers are not as prepared as they believe to work with students with disabilities in their first years as practicing educators. As a result, when general education teachers are faced with inclusive practice demands and limited preparation, their self-efficacy decreases (Hastings & Oakford, 2003). Furthermore, the

research presented in this study suggests that beginning elementary education teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions play an integral part in their preparation for working with students with disabilities. In fact, as novice teachers demonstrate their need and desire for information about students with disabilities and best instructional practices to create equal educational opportunities for all students; teacher educators must create a space where voices are welcomed and heard (Lynch, 2012) and begin to provide the support (e.g., mentors, collaborative partnerships, professional development) needed to accomplish this goal. This mixed methods study provided the platform by which beginning elementary teachers' voices were heard so that instruction and support can be provided to establish a common understanding of inclusion.

Although current trends in special education and inclusion demonstrate the potential to make a difference in the skills and confidence of beginning elementary teachers working with students with disabilities (Richards, 2010), it appears that there are still some gaps that exist in teacher preparation programs (Scheeler, 2008; Winter, 2006). It is apparent that well-trained teachers are a critical element of effective implementation of inclusion. Therefore, beginning elementary teachers need to feel comfortable interacting with students with disabilities and embrace the philosophy of inclusion (Sharma et al., 2008). For that reason, teacher education programs have a responsibility to both teachers and their students to ensure that educators are adequately prepared for the task of educating all students within the general education classroom (Carroll et al., 2003).

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## APPENDIX A

### BEGINNING TEACHER INCLUSION QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Beginning Teacher Inclusion Questionnaire

#### Section A

**Directions:** Please check or circle one response for each question.

#### Demographics

1. Gender : ☐ Female    ☐ Male
  
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Ethnicity:  
☐ African-American    ☐ Asian-American    ☐ Caucasian    ☐ Hispanic  
☐ Multi-racial    ☐ Native-American    ☐ Other (please specify)
  
4. Your position with the school district:  
       \_\_\_\_\_ General education teacher    \_\_\_\_\_ Special education teacher
  
5. Years of experience working with students with disabilities? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. Did your teacher preparation program require you to take any special education courses?    Yes            No
  
7. Did your teacher preparation program require you to participate in any practicum field experiences? Yes            No
  
8. What additional experience(s) have you had working with students with disabilities outside of the practicum field experience (i.e, sibling, friend, and daycare)?  
       \_\_\_\_\_  
       \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. As a teacher, have you participated in any professional development related to inclusion? Yes            No

## Section B

**Instructions:** Please use the key below to rate the following statements using a scale of 1 to 5. Circle the number to the right of each statement that best describes your response to the inclusion questions. There is no right or wrong answer. There is a comment section at the end of Section C to write any additional comments that you have about inclusion.

**Inclusion:** A professional belief that students with disabilities should be integrated into general education classrooms whether or not they can meet traditional curricular standards and should be full members of those classrooms.

1=Strongly Disagree    2=Disagree    3=Uncertain    4=Agree    5=Strongly Agree

<b>Attitude towards Inclusion</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
1. I believe in inclusion.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I am comfortable working with students with varying disabilities and abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Only students with mild to moderate disabilities should be included into general education classes.	1	2	3	4	5
4. All students, disabled and non-disabled should be served in general education classes.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Only special education teachers should be knowledgeable about inclusion.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My attitude towards inclusive practices has been influenced by course work and/or field experiences received in my teacher education program.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Inclusion is beneficial to all students.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am willing to make the necessary modifications and adaptations in my lesson plan to accommodate all of my students.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Students with disabilities are able to actively participate in general education classrooms	1	2	3	4	5
10. My attitude towards inclusion has been influenced by personal experiences with individuals with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
11. My teacher preparation program adequately prepared me to work with students with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I was ready to implement inclusive practices my first year as a classroom teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Beliefs and Perceptions of Preparation /Experience/Knowledge of Inclusion</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
13. I had an opportunity to observe inclusive practices being implemented in the classroom (i.e., lesson planning, differentiated, instruction, and classroom management) during my teacher preparation program.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I believe that I am well prepared to implement inclusive practices with lesson planning.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I believe that I am well prepared to implement inclusive practices with differentiated instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I believe that I am well prepared to implement inclusive practices with classroom management.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I believe that I am well prepared to work with students with special	1	2	3	4	5

educational needs.					
18. I believe that I am prepared to utilize the materials in my classroom to meet the needs of all of my students.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I believe that I am knowledgeable of various types of disabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I collaborate with colleagues (i.e., special education teacher, resource, general education) to provide the best instruction for all of my students.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I lack the knowledge and skills needed to work with students with special educational needs.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I believe that all students have the right to the same curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I believe that all teachers and administrators should be involved in the inclusion process.	1	2	3	4	5
24. My teacher education program provided me with the training needed to collaborate with other teachers to ensure that best instruction is provided for all students.	1	2	3	4	5
25. My teacher preparation program provided me with the training needed to differentiate instruction for diverse learners.	1	2	3	4	5
26. My teacher preparation program provided me the opportunity to work with students with disabilities	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Support from preparation to practice</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
27. I was provided adequate support during field experiences in my teacher preparation program (i.e., feedback, guidance, resources).	1	2	3	4	5
28. As a teacher, I am provided with the necessary support to work with students with disabilities.	1	2	3	4	5
29. My school supports inclusive education.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues about strategies and instructional practices that are effective in inclusion.	1	2	3	4	5
31. My school district offers opportunities for in-service training and professional development related to inclusion.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I participate in ongoing professional development related to working with students with disabilities	1	2	3	4	5

### Section C

The following questions require a written response. Please answer all questions with a thorough response.

1. How do you feel about including students with disabilities in your classroom?
2. What do you think most prepared you or not prepared you during your teacher preparation to work with students with disabilities?
3. As a beginning teacher, what do you perceive is a barrier to successful implementation of inclusion?
4. What do you think is needed to better support teachers with implementing inclusive practices as they transition from preparation to practice into the general education classroom?



**Additional Comments**

Please add any additional information that you feel is applicable to your preparation for inclusion and how it relates to your first years of teaching.

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Thank you for your participation in the survey!

## APPENDIX B

### IRB PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

#### CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

Project Title: Beginning Elementary Education Teachers' Perceptions Concerning Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms: Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Preparation

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Marva S Miller and Dr. Stephanie Kurtts

Participant's Name:

**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

**What is the study about?**

With the ultimate goal of inclusion being to create schools with prepared teachers that recognize all students have the right to participate in all aspects of the school community, teacher training institutions must provide the education necessary for effective implementation of inclusionary practices. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions of preparedness for inclusion and how their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions may affect or create obstacles that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive practices during their first years in the classroom. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why are you asking me?**

The reason for selecting you is to gain a better understanding of beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions of preparedness for inclusion.

**What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a short survey that should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey contains three sections: section A) demographic information, section B) contains 32 Likert type scale items, and section C) requires your response to 5 open-ended questions. An additional section is provided to allow you to provide any information on inclusion that was not addressed within the survey.

**What are the risks to me?**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. However, if any of the questions make you uncomfortable you may choose not to respond or withdraw from the study entirely.

Approved IRB

1/16/15

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Marva S Miller at [msmille7@uncg.edu](mailto:msmille7@uncg.edu) and Dr. Stephanie Kurtts at [sakurtts@uncg.edu](mailto:sakurtts@uncg.edu)

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**

The acquired data may provide insight to the missing components that are needed to enhance teacher education programming at UNCG to ensure successful implementation of inclusive practices. Therefore, adding to the current knowledge base of beginning elementary education teachers' and their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about inclusion.

**Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study. Upon completion of the survey you will be entered in a drawing for a \$100 gift card. Should you elect not to participate in the drawing, you will be asked to send an email to Marva S Miller at [msmille7@uncg.edu](mailto:msmille7@uncg.edu) stating so.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

All gathered information will be stored in a locked file cabinet, password protected, therefore, not identifying participants by name when data are disseminated. Data will be kept on a secure flash drive for three years. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Absolute confidentiality of data through the internet cannot be provided due to the limited protections of internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigator also has the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By clicking the "I agree" button to participate in the on-line survey/activity (used for an IRB-approved waiver of signature) you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By participating, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant to participate, in this study described to you by Marva S Miller.

Approved IRB

1/16/15

**APPENDIX C**  
**SAMPLE RECRUIT LETTER**

Sample Recruit Letter

Dear UNCG Colleague,

I am a current doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. As a recent graduate of the Teacher Education Program at UNCG, you have been selected to participate in a research study involving an on-line survey. The survey is designed to explore beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions concerning teaching in inclusive classrooms and their beliefs and attitudes toward preparation. Your participation will potentially provide valuable information for improving the teacher education program for future teacher candidates at both the preservice and inservice level.

If you choose to participate in this on-line survey, a link to the survey is provided at the end of this email. Clicking the link below will take you to an on-line consent form. There will be a link to click on to indicate your agreement to participate in the survey. Directions for completing the survey will follow the on-line consent form. Please note that because this is a research study, there are formal required statements that are made prior to the survey. The survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. If you should have any questions, please send me an email. When the survey closes December 1, those participants that have completed the survey will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 gift card. The winner will be notified through email. If you would not like to be considered for the drawing, please notify me at the email listed below.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this survey. Best wishes in your career!

Marva Miller  
Msmille7@uncg.edu

[Click here to take the survey](#)

Approved IRB  
1/16/15

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE SURVEY COVER LETTER

#### Sample Survey Cover Letter

Dear Fellow Teacher:

My name is Marva Miller and I am a graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro working on a doctorate in specialized education services. For my dissertation, I am examining beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions of working in inclusive classrooms and attitudes and beliefs toward preparation. The purpose for this study is to examine beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions of preparedness for inclusion and how their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions may affect or create obstacles that hinder the successful implementation of inclusive practices during their first years in the classroom. Because you are a beginning elementary education teacher, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by clicking on the link below to complete a survey. Your participation is voluntary.

The following questionnaire will require approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire contains three sections which include: a) demographics, b) 36 Likert-type scale questions and c) 5 open-ended questions. There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study. There are not any foreseeable risks to you as a participant in this study. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, no identifying information is being requested. If you choose to participate in the survey, please answer all questions as honestly as possible by February 20, 2015 (**this will be 3 weeks from the initial date**).

Data will be kept on a secure flash drive for three years. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Absolute confidentiality of data through the internet cannot be provided due to the limited protections of internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing. Email responses will be kept confidential by assigning them study numbers with no link to their name and stripping them of any identifiers.

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigator also has the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

The data obtained from this study could influence the implementation of preservice coursework and field experiences to be fulfilled in general teacher education preparation, as well as the future application of knowledge offered through professional development, in-service training, and sustained support that beginning teachers experience. If you choose to participate in this on-line survey, a link to the survey is provided at the end of this email. Directions for completing the survey will follow.

By clicking the "I agree" button to participate in the on-line survey/activity (used for an IRB-approved waiver of signature) you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you

Approved IRB  
1/16/15

fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By participating, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant to participate, in this study described to you by Marva S Miller.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Marva S Miller at [msmille7@uncg.edu](mailto:msmille7@uncg.edu) and Dr. Stephanie Kurtts at [sakurtts@uncg.edu](mailto:sakurtts@uncg.edu). If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351. Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors, as well as sharing your insights as a beginning teacher.

Sincerely,  
Marva S Miller  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Doctoral Candidate for Specialized Education Services  
[Msmille7@uncg.edu](mailto:Msmille7@uncg.edu)

Approved IRB  
1/16/15

## APPENDIX E

### SAMPLE RECRUIT FOLLOW-UP

#### Sample Recruit Follow-Up

Dear Fellow Teacher,

You are invited to participate in a research study about beginning teachers. This on-line survey is designed to explore beginning elementary education teachers' perceptions concerning teaching in inclusive classrooms and their beliefs and attitudes toward preparation. If you have already completed the online survey, thank you! If you haven't completed the survey yet, please consider doing so now.

Beginning general and special education teachers are needed to respond in the next 3 weeks. The survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. The data will be used in my dissertation and may potentially impact future teacher preparation programs and on-going training in teacher education at the preservice and inservice level.

To access the survey, type the address below into your URL and click. It is completely anonymous and confidential. If you should have any questions, please send me an email. When the survey closes February 20, 2015, those participants that have completed the survey will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 gift card. The winner will be notified through email. If you would not like to be entered in the drawing, please notify me at the email listed below.

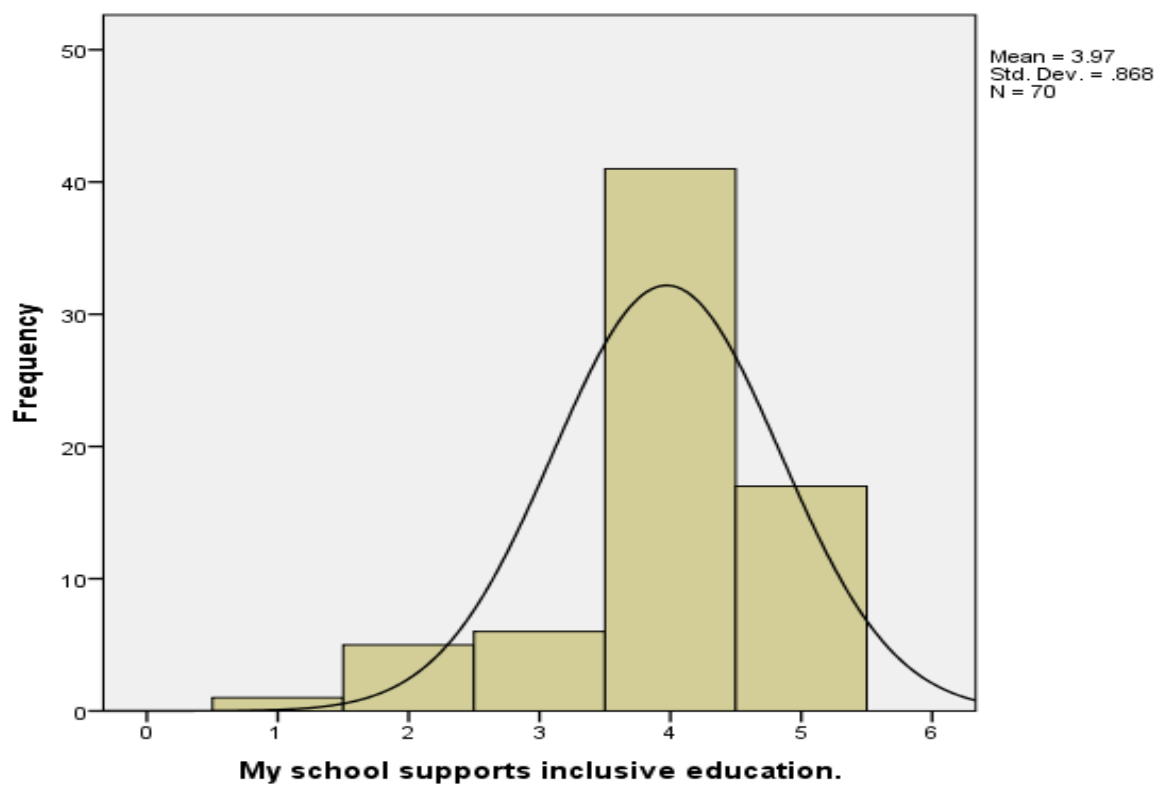
Thank you for taking the time to help a fellow teacher!

Marva S. Miller  
[Msmille7@uncg.edu](mailto:Msmille7@uncg.edu)

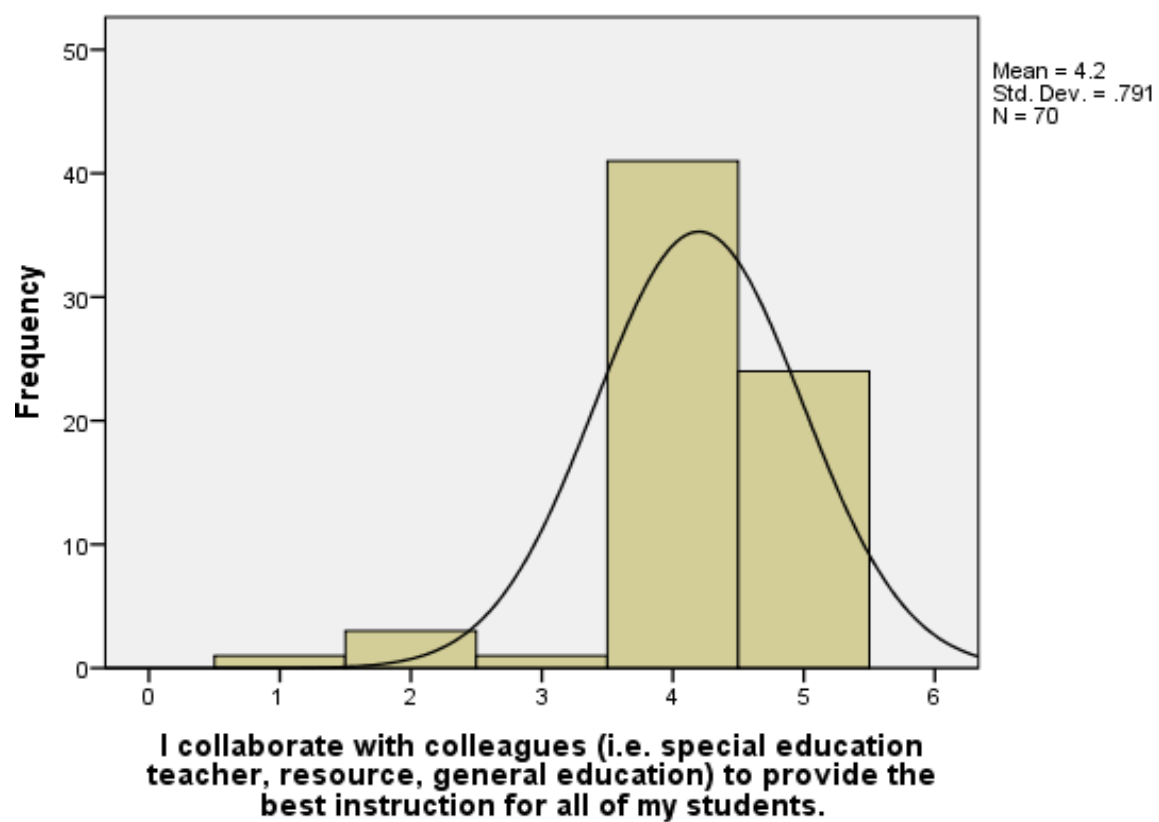
<https://www.qualtrics.com.uncg/BTIQ> (example)

Approved IRB  
1/16/15

**APPENDIX F**  
**SKEWNESS AND KURTOSIS GRAPHS**







## APPENDIX G

### ATTITUDE TOWARD INCLUSION FREQUENCIES AND MEAN SCORES

	SD	D	Number (%)		SA	Mean
			U	A		
Q1 I believe in inclusion	1(1)	9(13)	14(20)	35(50)	11(16)	3.66
Q2 I am comfortable working with students with varying abilities and disabilities	0	11(16)	11(16)	41(59)	7(10)	3.63
Q3 Only students with mild disabilities should be included into general education classes	3(4)	9(13)	14(20)	39(56)	5(7)	3.49
Q4 All students disabled and non-disabled should be served in general education classes	2(3)	22(31)	17(24)	27(39)	2(3)	3.07
Q5 Only special education teachers should be knowledgeable about inclusion	44(63)	26(37)	0	0	0	1.37
Q6 My attitude towards inclusive practices has been influenced by course work and/or field experiences received in my teacher education program.	3(4)	16(23)	17(24)	28(40)	6(9)	3.26
Q7 Inclusion is beneficial to all students	2(3)	21(30)	12(17)	25(36)	10(14)	3.29
Q8 I am willing to make the necessary modifications and adaptations in my lesson plan to accommodate all of my students	0	2(3)	1(1)	37(53)	30(43)	4.36
Q9 Students with disabilities are able to actively participate in general education classrooms	2(3)	8(11)	18(26)	39(56)	3(4)	3.47

Q10						
My attitude towards inclusion has been influenced by personal experiences with individuals with disabilities	1(1)	6(9)	8(11)	38(54)	17(25)	3.91
Q11						
My teacher preparation program adequately prepared me to work with students with disabilities	8(11)	32(46)	12(17)	17(24)	1(1)	2.59
Q12						
I was ready to implement inclusive practices my first year as a classroom teachers	9(13)	31(44)	13(19)	16(23)	1(1)	2.56

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**Note:** SD=strongly disagree, D= disagree, U=uncertain, A=agree, SA=strongly agree, N= Total Number of responses

## APPENDIX H

### BELIEFS, PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCE, AND KNOWLEDGE OF INCLUSION FREQUENCIES, PERCENTAGES, AND MEAN SCORES

	SD	D	Number (%)		SA	Mean
			U	A		
Q 13 I had an opportunity to observe inclusive practices being implemented in the classroom during my teacher preparation program	3(4)	31(44)	5(7)	24(34)	7(10)	3.01
Q14 I believe that I am well prepared to implement inclusive practices with lesson planning	2(3)	16(23)	12(17)	37(53)	3(4)	3.33
Q15 I believe that I am well prepared to implement inclusive practices with differentiated instruction	2(3)	10(14)	13(19)	42(60)	3(4)	3.49
Q16 I believe that I am well prepared to implement inclusive practices with classroom management	0	13(19)	13(19)	41(59)	3(4)	3.49
Q17 I believe that I am well prepared to work with students with special educational needs	0	19(27)	20(29)	28(40)	3(4)	3.21
Q18 I believe that I am prepared to utilize the materials in my classroom to meet the needs of all of my students	0	11(16)	6(9)	50(71)	3(4)	3.64
Q19 I believe that I am knowledgeable of various types of disabilities	3(4)	14(20)	9(13)	39(56)	5(7)	3.41

			Number	(%)		
	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean
Q20 I collaborate with colleagues to provide the best instruction for all of my students	1(1)	3(4)	1(1)	41(59)	24(34)	4.20
Q21 I lack the knowledge and skills needed to work with students with special educational needs	2(3)	35(50)	14(20)	18(26)	1(1)	2.73
Q22 I believe that all students have the right to the same curriculum	1(1)	4(6)	9(13)	39(56)	17(24)	3.96
Q23 I believe that all teachers and administrators should be involved in the inclusion process	0	2(3)	6(9)	38(54)	24(34)	4.20
Q24 My teacher education program provided me with the training needed to collaborate with other teachers to ensure that best instruction is provided for all students	3(4)	15(21)	9(13)	35(50)	8(11)	3.43
Q25 My teacher preparation program provided me with the training needed to differentiate instruction for diverse learners	2(3)	9(13)	12(17)	39(56)	8(11)	3.60
Q26 My teacher preparation program provided me the opportunity to work with students with disabilities	6(9)	27(39)	11(16)	21(30)	5(7)	2.89

**Note:** SD=strongly disagree, D= disagree, U=uncertain, A=agree, SA=strongly agree, N= Total Number of responses.

# APPENDIX I

## SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM PREPARATION TO PRACTICE FREQUENCIES AND MEAN SCORES

	SD	<i>Number</i> <i>(%)</i>		A	SA	Mean
		D	U			
Q 27 I was provided adequate support during field experiences in my teacher preparation program	2(3)	11(16)	6(9)	37(53)	14(20)	3.71
Q28 As a teacher, I am provided with the necessary support to work with students with disabilities	2(3)	19(27)	13(19)	32(46)	4(6)	3.24
Q 29 My school supports inclusive education	1(1)	5(7)	6(9)	41(59)	17(24)	3.97
Q30 I have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues about strategies and instructional practices that are effective in inclusion	1(1)	8(11)	8(11)	45(64)	8(11)	3.73
Q31 My school district offers opportunities for in-service training and professional development related to inclusion	2(3)	13(19)	24(34)	26(37)	5(7)	3.27
Q 32 I participate in ongoing professional development related to working with students with disabilities	4(6)	33(47)	13(19)	18(26)	2(3)	2.73

*Note.* SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, U = uncertain, A = agree, SA = strongly agree, *N* = Total number of responses.